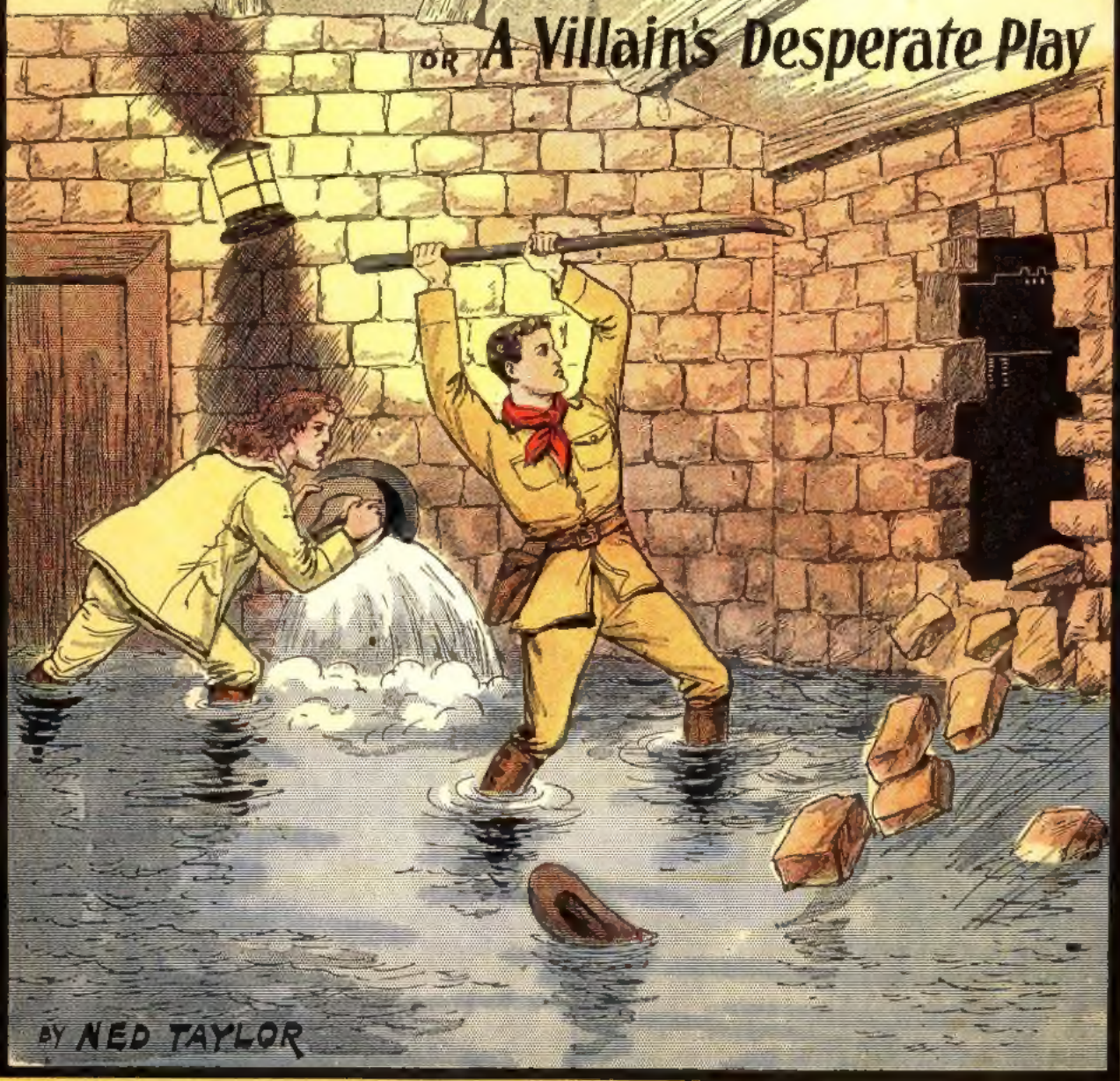
No. 53 5 CENTS

Young Rough Riders Weekly

MOST FASCINATING WESTERN STORIES

THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDER TRAPPED

OR A Villain's Desperate Play



Every moment the rushing waters rose higher and higher. The young Rough Rider seized the crowbar and dealt the wall a succession of smashing blows.

The Young Rough Riders Weekly

Most Fascinating Western Stories

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THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDER TRAPPED;

OR,

A Villain's Desperate Play.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.

"By George, you can side-track me for an empty box car and label me for the repair shop, if this isn't my old pal, Ted Strong!"

The speaker was a tall, red-haired, bland-faced, blue-eyed young man.

He was faultlessly dressed with checked suit, silk, fancy vest, light brown fedora hat and glossy patent leather shoes.

On one finger of the left hand glistened a large diamond and in every particular he gave evidence of being prosperous.

The young man had been sitting in the office of the best hotel in the mountain town of Owensville, California, when he suddenly sprang to his feet with the exclamation which opens this story upon his lips.

A moment before several young men, dressed neatly in khaki, military-cut garments, had entered the hotel and were gathered around the desk, scribbling their names upon the register.

One of the young men had held a few words with the clerk of the hotel, and had been handed a telegram. He had read the telegram and written an answer to it. In summoning the porter to carry it to the telegraph office, the young man had turned toward the visitor in the hotel office.

It was then that the well-dressed youth suddenly arose and uttered the exclamation.

He had recognized the young man, who had just sent the telegram, to be an old friend whom he had known in the East, and he sprang forward to grasp the hand that was now stretched out to him.

"Well, Frank O'Melia, you are certainly the last man I ever expected to find in this country. How are you? How came you to be here?"

It was Ted Strong, the leader of the famous company of young rough riders, who spoke, and Ted's eyes lighted

with pleasure as he shook the hand of his old college chum, Frank O'Melia.

Frank O'Melia was a rollicking, good-natured sort of a boy, always full of fun. He was the only son of a rich and doting father, and in all his life could not remember of having had a wish ungratified.

Otherwise from what might be expected, under such conditions, Frank was not wild. He did not drink to excess and did not gamble.

He was a popular member of the best society in his native town, and, at his club, was known as the most expert member in the use of up-to-date slang phrases.

None of his slang was of the vulgar variety, however, and many of the phrases he originated soon came to be adopted generally. Being by nationality Irish-American, Frank was naturally quick-witted, and his whole nature seemed to be steeped in humor.

In answer to Ted's questions Frank said:

"My brain case got full of cobwebs and the doctor ordered me to clean house. It was so dull in the East that my skin commenced to turn yellow, so I thought I'd take to the big hills toward where the sun gets away. Got here yesterday."

"Well, how do you like the West, so far?" asked Ted.

"The strip I've seen is fine and rosy. But you should see me feed. I'll bet the rim around a twenty-dollar yellow boy that I have got outside of more body fuel yesterday and to-day than my digestive organs would have had to wrestle with in six weeks at home."

"You came out here for your health?"

"Yes. The old pill-juggler I went to see, told me it was a toss-up for me—either to pull some dough out of the money barn and hot-foot for California, or else order a wooden overcoat. I was behind with lessons on the harp, and was sure I couldn't pass an exam. for an angel's degree, so I piked out here. But I didn't expect to pipe you off so soon, although I intended looking you up before going back. I have sat up late a good many nights, spelling out the wonderful stories of your career in the magazines and papers. Are these other fellows members of your famous rough riders?"

"They are some of the boys," returned Ted, and then he made his old friend acquainted with Bud Morgan, Kit Summers, Bob Martin and Ben Tremont, who were standing a short distance away, interestedly witnessing the greeting between Ted and O'Melia.

Frank's affable manner soon won him a good place in the esteem of the young rough riders. His witticisms were refreshing, and it was not long until they considered him one of their party.

In a few minutes Ted Strong said: "Frank, we just got a very important telegram, which makes it impossible for us to remain here longer than early to-morrow morning. We are then to start on a trip that may be filled with dangers and hardships, such as you are unused to. Were it not for that I would ask you to join my band for a while, for I would like to talk over some of the old times with you."

"That is just what I hit the trail for—to mix into something real warm and lively. I want to dance to jig time—have a few narrow escapes. I want to go home with bullet wounds all over my carcass, one ear sewed on to my head bottom side up, and court plaster all over my body. I want to have some good, tall stories, all framed up to tell about the wild and woolly West, when I strike the old boys again, and they won't believe them unless I have some proofs. You can all shake your hands in glee, for little Frankie accepts the invitation to become a rough rider."

"You will have to get some different kind of an outfit from the clothes you are wearing now, if you go with us," remarked Ben Tremont.

"Now don't let your belts get tangled on that score," returned Frank, "for I've got the whole works ready to button myself into. I came out here prepared for anything and everything, from a circuit of the golf links to getting scalped by a live Indian. Come up to the room and I'll show you."

A few minutes later the young rough riders were gathered together in the sleeping room of the hotel which Frank O'Melia had engaged, and they were standing around one of five big trunks that the wealthy young Easterner had brought with him.

From the trunk Frank was taking rifles, knives, revolvers, gauntlets, spurs, cavalry boots and articles of every conceivable nature that he thought he might find use for in the West.

In another trunk he had a khaki suit, similar to the suits worn by the young rough riders.

Ted was surprised at the good taste Frank had used in selecting his outfit, and noted that his friend would only need to purchase a good horse to be fitted as completely as could be desired, to join the young rough riders in their expected undertaking.

Ted now remembered that, at college, Frank was considered one of the best horsemen among the students, and

he had little doubt that, with a few days of roughing it, Frank would really be a valuable member of the company.

So it was decided that Frank should accompany Ted and his young rough riders on their trip, which was to begin the next morning.

That there should be no delay in the morning, Ted proposed that Frank try and buy a pony somewhere in the town that night. They decided to attend to the matter immediately after supper.

During the meal Ted told Frank about their proposed mission, and explained about the telegram that called them so suddenly away.

Several days previous to the time the telegram was received, Ted and his companions had just finished breaking up a band of outlaws known as the Mojave Terrors.

This band was under the leadership of a Frenchman, whose name was learned to be Frank Casse. Casse's bandits had invaded the town of Gallego, in California, stolen a large sum of money from the bank of that town, and had kidnaped two girls, daughters of wealthy citizens. The girls were to be held for ransom.

A young man, by the name of Leo Morrissey, had requested the assistance of the young rough riders to pursue the bandits, and had accompanied Ted and his companions on the chase.

The stronghold of the bandits, which was situated in a chain of mountains in the great California desert, was finally reached by the young rough riders, and, after some startling experiences, Ted had succeeded in capturing every member of the band except Frank Casse, the leader, and his wife. The wife had helped her husband to escape.

The details of this pursuit of the Mojave Terrors are familiar to those who read last week's number of THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS WEEKLY. It was No. 52, and the title is "The Young Rough Rider's Great Play; or, The Mad Ally of a Villain."

The young rough riders had originally started on a pleasure trip, on horseback, through California, and, after rounding up the outlaws, the prisoners had been placed in the jail at Gallego and the boys had continued on their trip.

Arriving at Owensville, Ted had received a telegram from Leo Morrissey, to the effect that half of the bandits had escaped.

Frank Casse, single-handed, had broken into the jail and released some of his followers.

In the telegram Morrissey once more asked the assistance of the young rough riders in recapturing the bandits, and Ted had wired back the following answer:

"You can rely upon the young rough riders."

O'Melia was greatly interested in the story of the capture of the Mojave Terrors, and expressed his delight in the prospect of considerable excitement in the campaign about to be commenced.

Immediately after supper Ted, Ben Tremont and O'Melia left the hotel with the intention of looking about the town in the hope of finding some one who had a horse for sale, that would meet the requirements of the young Easterner.

Ted was the first to step out of the hotel door, and he had not taken three steps from the building when he uttered an exclamation, turned quickly, and ran back toward the door.

He almost jostled Frank, who had closely followed, off his feet.

Putting his hands on the young man's shoulders, Ted turned Frank quickly about and hurried him back into the hotel.

"What is the excitement all about, Ted?" asked big Ben Tremont.

"Look across the road!" was Ted's exclamatory reply.

Through a crack in the door Ben looked over Ted's shoulder, and himself uttered an exclamation of surprise.

A saloon was directly across the street from the hotel, and, dismounting before it, were thirteen men, who had just ridden up.

One of the men our friends recognized as Frank Casse, the erstwhile leader of the Mojave Terrors!

CHAPTER II.

A NIGHT'S PURSUIT.

When Ted had first caught sight of the mounted outlaws they were just pulling up in front of the saloon opposite, and Ted had hurried out of sight, hoping that the bandits would not see him.

Ted had instantly recognized the handsome leader of the outlaws, and he knew that Casse would not halt at the saloon if he caught a glimpse of the young rough rider.

Should the outlaws become alarmed and put spurs to their horses, Ted knew that they could easily get away, as it would take himself and his companions some time to get their horses from the hotel stable and start in pursuit.

But, quick as Ted had been, he was not successful in getting out of sight soon enough.

One of the bandits had seen him and recognized him.

The observing outlaw drew his horse up close to that of the leader and said something in a low tone.

Ted saw Casse raise his head quickly, and glance toward the hotel, then give a quick order to his men.

Those who had dismounted sprang into their saddles again, and Ted saw they were about to ride away.

As the outlaws began putting their spurs to their horses' flanks, Ted threw the door of the hotel wide open, and sprang out on the hotel porch, a revolver extended in his right hand.

As he made this bold move three of the bandits fired upon our young hero, but their bullets went wild.

At the same instant Ted's weapon was fired.

The young rough rider was a crack shot, as was proved when his revolver spoke at this particular time.

One of the bandits gave a loud cry of pain and fell from his saddle!

Ted had intended to aim his revolver at Frank Casse, but several of the outlaws had ridden between himself and the outlaw leader, making it impossible to find him with a bullet.

Before Ted could fire another shot the bandits had passed beyond range, and the sounds of the clattering hoofs of their horses disappeared in the darkness.

By this time all of Ted's companions were gathered upon the porch, and he told them in a few words what had happened.

As Bud Morgan, Bob Martin and Kit Summers started for the hotel stable to get the horses belonging to the young rough riders, Ted and Frank started toward the spot where the wounded bandit had fallen.

Ben Tremont started off down the road to catch the wounded outlaw's horse.

Ted and Frank found that the bandit was not fatally injured, and, with proper care, would probably recover.

Just at this moment a gruff voice asked Ted: "What was that shooting? Anyone been killed?"

Ted glanced up quickly and saw a rough, grizzled-faced stranger standing near.

"May I ask who you are?" asked Ted.

"I'm the sheriff," was the reply.

"Good," exclaimed Ted. "You are just the man I wanted to see."

Then Ted told the sheriff of what had happened. The sheriff agreed to take charge of the wounded outlaw, see that the man had his wound properly cared for, and hold him until Ted should return to the town, or should send word regarding what should be done with the prisoner.

By this time Ben Tremont had returned with the prisoner's horse.

"There is a horse for you," said Ted to Frank. "It looks like a good animal, too. The prisoner will have no immediate use for it, and you had better borrow it, for a while."

While Frank was in his room, hurriedly changing his clothes and donning his khaki suit, Ben Tremont helped the young Easterner sort out what weapons he would want to take with him. These weapons Ben loaded and then filled Frank's cartridge belt.

In the meantime, Ted was settling the bills with the hotel clerk, and giving directions for storing such of the company's outfit as could not be taken with them, in their pursuit of the bandits.

Just as he heard Bud Morgan's voice singing out that the horses were all ready, a telegraph messenger appeared at the desk with a telegram.

The message was for Ted Strong.

The young rough rider tore it open and found it was from Leo Morrissey, and in answer to the one he had sent Leo early in the evening.

The message read as follows:

"Am following outlaws. They are headed in your direction. Keep an eye open for them. Will arrive in Owensville to-night."

The telegram was dated from a railroad town not over twenty miles from Owensville. Ted's telegram had evidently been forwarded to Morrissey from Gallego.

At that moment Frank and Ben Tremont appeared and stated they were ready to start.

Ted hastily wrote a note to inform Morrissey where the rough riders had gone and left it with the hotel clerk to deliver to that young man when he arrived.

A few minutes later the young rough riders had mounted their horses and had started at a stiff pace along the road taken, some time before, by Casse and his followers.

It was a long night's ride, and a hard one. Every few minutes it was necessary to call a halt, and spend several precious seconds in scratching matches for the purpose of examining the trail, to ascertain if the hoof marks, left by the outlaws' horses, were still to be found.

Once they found that they had lost the trail, and it was necessary to go back for a quarter of a mile to find it.

Notwithstanding these delays, the young rough riders traveled nearly forty miles before morning, and, as the first streaks of daylight appeared over the eastern mountain peaks, they found themselves following a trail leading out of the western side of the Sierra Nevada range of mountains. As it grew still lighter they saw before them a wonderful valley.

The trail they were following took them down to a wide strip of table-land.

Following the hoof marks of the outlaws' horses they approached to the very edge of the table-land.

They found that the edge of this high plateau was really the brink of a high precipice.

Nearly four thousand feet below could be seen the verdant bottom of the valley.

The valley was not over a mile and a half wide at this spot, and our friends could see clear across to the opposite mountain plain, very similar to the one they were upon.

Far away down the valley, almost out of sight, Ted's eagle eyes discovered a grand sight.

Pouring over the precipice that bordered the valley, was a large stream of water, like a silver ribbon, making three great leaps to the foot of the precipice.

As Ted noted the sight he gave an exclamation of pleased wonder.

"Boys," he said, "this is the famous Yosemite Valley, one of the wonders of the world."

"Sure?" asked Ben Tremont.

"Yes, for see that great fall yonder. I have heard too many descriptions of the grand spectacle of the Merced River, falling over the perpendicular rocks into the Yosemite Valley, to be mistaken."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Bob Martin, swinging his horse around. "As my old friend, Shakespeare, would say: 'Man's feeble efforts seem like crude, unfinished chunks of Kansas clay, when nature butts in with her products.'"

This was the first opportunity Martin had had for springing a Shakespeare quotation since Frank O'Melia had joined the party, and the young Irish-American looked at Bob in surprise. Ted noted the fact, and could not help smiling. He wondered what Frank would say, for he knew O'Melia was not the boy to allow anything like Bob's misquotations to pass without comment.

"Say, my young scholar," said O'Melia, "have you seen a doctor recently? If not, you had better attend to it right away. You have been smoking out of the wrong pipe. Look at your transfer and see if you haven't taken the wrong car."

"What do you mean?" asked Bob.

"Why, I mean that you have slipped your trolley."

"Slipped my—my—trolley?"

"Sure. You're adrift. Your steamer has lost its anchor."

"Are you referring to my very apt and correct quotation of Shakespeare?" asked Bob, with great dignity.

"No, no; not at all," came the answer. "I was referring to the fact that you were trying to make out that Shakespeare said something which was so rotten that he would have been hung for it in his day, had he dared to have said it."

Bob seemed inclined to get mad. His face grew red, but the hearty laugh from the other rough riders, which followed the Irishman's last sally, unnerved him. He saw that the sympathy of the crowd was with O'Melia, and held his peace.

A few minutes later he was chatting as blithely as any of the party, and seemed to have forgotten all about the mark that had been made of him by the Irish youth.

The party stood upon the brink of the precipice for several minutes, admiring the scenery below them, when Ted remarked:

"Well, boys, this isn't following the outlaws. Let us see where their tracks lead to from here."

He had hardly finished speaking when there was heard the report of a rifle, and a bullet buried itself in the ground, not a yard from where Ted was standing!

He looked quickly up and saw a puff of smoke hanging over the top of the small ridge of rocks, about two hundred yards down the valley.

With rifle to his shoulder, the young rough rider stood with eyes glued to the spot for at least two minutes, but no human being came into sight and no other shot was fired.

CHAPTER III.

THE AMBUSH.

After waiting some time, in hopes that the person who had fired the single shot would again show himself, Ted called to his companions to remount their horses.

When all were mounted, he started his horse along the table-land toward the ridge of rocks, from which the shot had come.

As they neared the ridge, they saw that there was an opening through which they could ride to the other side, and, as he passed through, Ted noticed that there was a wide stretch of country in view, which sloped down to a fringe of large fir trees half a mile away.

Just as Ted was through the opening in the ridge he gave a shout to his companions to hurry up.

Far down the incline, and nearly to the edge of the forest, he saw the mounted outlaws, riding at full speed toward the trees.

"Get a move on, boys," said Ted; "we have our men in sight."

At breakneck speed the young rough riders urged their horses down the sloping mountain side, but, when they reached the fringe of trees, the outlaws were out of sight.

It was easy to trace them through the forest, however, for the trees and bushes were close together, and the ground was clothed with a thick growth of rank grass.

The feet of the outlaws' horses had tramped down this grass, and numerous broken twigs and small limbs of trees left behind the bandits a trail as plain as if they had taken particular pains to make their route easily followed.

The young rough riders had traveled a quarter of a mile into this forest, when Ted suddenly reined in his horse and motioned the rest of the company to stop.

"I don't like the looks of this," said he.

"What do yer mean?" asked Bud Morgan.

"These bandits have taken no pains to disguise their trail," replied Ted. "They even seem to have taken pains to break off these branches of trees and bushes, as if to make the trail plain."

"That air is sensible talk, all right," replied Bud; "but I wouldn't hev noticed it if you hadn't spoke of it."

"What do you make of it?" asked Kit Summers.

"Why, it may be that Casse is trying to lead us into an ambush," returned Ted.

"You are right! Surrender! Every hand up!"

The three sentences were spoken in a quick, decisive, authoritative voice, and the person who had spoken arose from a crouching position in the tall grass, directly to the right of the young rough rider.

Every eye in the company was directed at once in the direction from which the voice had come.

"Frank Casse!" exclaimed Ted.

"Yes, I am Frank Casse," returned the outlaw, "and you will find, before you are through with me, Ted Strong, that I can be a demon as well as a lamb. When I had you in my power before, I treated you like a friend, like a guest of my household. You returned that kindness by putting me out of business, by jailing all of my men. You would have jailed me, too, had I not escaped. Now I am after revenge. You have not long to live, and your death will not be an easy one."

As the leader of the outlaws was delivering this somewhat lengthy speech, Ted noticed that from the other side of the company other men now arose—members of Casse's band.

Each man had a leveled rifle in his hand!

The young rough riders were certainly in a trap.

It looked as if they were surely in the power of relentless foes.

Besides having the drop on our friends, the bandits outnumbered Ted and his friends nearly two to one.

It was a serious predicament that the rough riders found themselves in.

As the hands of the young rough riders were raised toward heaven, Ted, in a low voice, managed to remark, unheard by the bandits, to Bud Morgan, who was near him: "Try the old trick with the horses."

Bud's eyes glistened as he heard the remark, and his lips twitched, but he only nodded his head to assure Ted that he had heard.

As the boys raised their hands, Frank Casse and two other bandits came from the bushes, the bandit leader starting directly toward Ted Strong.

When Casse had nearly reached Ted, and was about to lay his hand upon the bridle of the young rough rider's horse, Ted gave the animal a peculiar poke with the toe of his boot in its ribs.

The animal swerved suddenly, as if frightened by the outstretched hand of the bandit leader.

"Whoa!" exclaimed Ted, at the same time giving the horse's ribs another and harder poke.

This time the animal whirled clear around, and, before the outlaw could move out of the way, Ted's horse had raised both hind heels and planted them both against the outlaw's shoulder.

It was a wicked kick, and it sent the outlaw leader to the ground in a heap!

In the meantime, Bud had been using similar tactics with his horse, and had handled the animal so that one of the other approaching bandits had been kicked in the head and knocked into the deep grass, insensible.

At the same moment that the horses had kicked, Ted gave a quick command, and every member of the young

rough rider's band suddenly wheeled their horses and started at a fast canter back over the trail they had come.

The outlaws who had not been hurt were so surprised at the turn affairs had taken that they forgot to shoot until the boys had started the retreat, and then the thickness of the trees spoiled their aim.

The only damage done by their bullets was a scratch upon the arm of Bud Morgan, made by a bullet which just cut through his coat sleeve, and which barely touched his skin.

The young rough riders retreated only a few rods, until they came to a group of rocks rising about level with their eyes.

There were six of these rocks, arranged in almost a complete circle.

Into the center of the group of rocks rode the boys, and then dismounted.

Seeing the position taken by the young men, the bandits did not choose to pursue at once. They were probably waiting until the extent of their leader's injuries were investigated.

Casse, however, could not have been hurt as much as might have been expected, for it was soon evident that he was talking with his men, scolding them for allowing the young rough riders to get away, and giving them directions for making an attack.

Just what tactics the outlaws were about to employ could not be determined at once, but, in a moment, Ted saw that they were making a wide circle toward the right, and he cautioned his men to look well to their weapons and see that they were in perfect working condition.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DESERTED MINE.

It soon became evident that the outlaws were intending to make a complete circle of the position in which our friends had ensconced themselves.

The rocks, however, made a complete circle around our heroes, and the outlaws soon found that the defense of the young rough riders was equally strong on every side.

Then the outlaws gathered in a bunch, as if for consultation.

A moment more the bandits began a retreat, and soon passed out of sight.

"Hadn't we better foller 'em up?" asked Bud Morgan.

"No; wait a minute or two longer," replied Ted. "I have an idea they are making for the top of that ridge."

To the right, about two hundred yards from where the young rough riders were stationed, there arose a high ledge of rocks. From the top of the ridge, could they get there, the bandits would be able to look right down upon the rough riders, and pour a rain of bullets into every corner of their position.

When he was certain that the outlaws had passed out of sight, Ted gave orders for his men to move.

The young rough riders passed out from the center of the circle of rocks, and took a position behind the line of bowlders on the opposite side from the ridge.

From between two spiral points of rock, Ted took a position where he could see the whole line of the top of the ridge.

Here he watched, rifle in hand for quick work, for nearly ten minutes.

Then his companions saw him suddenly pull his gun to his shoulder and fire.

Ted had seen the head of one of the outlaws appear above the top of the rocky ridge.

The outlaws had made a circle of the ridge, and on the opposite side found a place where they could ascend.

Immediately following the discharge of Ted's rifle, a shout of pain came from the direction of the ridge, and the young rough riders knew that Ted's shot had taken effect.

The moment Ted had fired he sprang toward his horse, giving an order for the others to mount quickly.

"Now, after the villains!" he yelled, putting the spurs to his horse.

Ted hoped to surprise the outlaws by a sudden attack and put them to rout.

In this he was successful, for, as the young rough riders rounded the end of the ridge, the bandits, now only eleven in number, were found to be in full retreat.

As Ted caught sight of them, they were riding at top speed into the mouth of the canyon, which started off at right angles from the mountain ridge that bordered the Yosemite Valley.

Into this canyon, directly on the heels of the outlaws, dashed the young rough rider and his five followers.

It was a long and hard chase that followed, but the outlaws had the advantage of having horses much fresher than those ridden by the rough riders. All night Ted and his companions had ridden, while the animals of the bandits had had several hours' rest.

In an hour this advantage became noticeable, for the

bandits were gradually drawing away from the rough riders.

As soon as they were out of sight in the winding canyon, the chances of running down the outlaws were greatly reduced, for there were many branching canyons, leading off in every direction from the main one, and the rough riders found it necessary to stop at each of these to make sure of the direction taken by the party under Frank Casse's leadership.

At noon Ted called a halt.

"There is no use for wearing out our horses in this manner," he said, "for our chances of running the bandits down are getting slimmer every minute."

The halt had been made near a grassy bank, bordering a swift-running, little mountain stream. It was an ideal camping place, and Ted proposed to give the horses a rest, and get a meal, before taking up the trail.

"We can follow the trail, all right," he said, "and we have all summer ahead of us. We will go slow and sure from now on, and keep at it until we have Frank Casse and his men cornered."

After a rest of about three hours, the rough riders again started on their pursuit, going moderately fast and paying particular attention to the trail left by the bandits.

They were now following a gradual descent, and by the middle of the afternoon they came to a place where the canyon opened into a wide tract of sandy plain, which Ted knew was far below the level of the Yosemite Valley.

This tract of land was not strictly desert land. It was very sandy, but there were occasional tufts of grass.

Perhaps the tract was three miles in width. On the opposite side could be seen the bordering range of mountains, and it was directly toward these distant peaks that the hoof prints of the bandits' horses were headed.

The journey across this sand valley was necessarily slow, for the horses sank above the fetlocks in the fine sand at every step.

It was nearly dusk when the young rough riders at last reached the shadows of the mountains, on the western border of the valley, and almost the first object that attracted their attention was the open shaft in the mountain side, leading to what was evidently a deserted mine.

The shaft led straight into the mountain, and, as the young rough riders paused for a moment and dismounted, they saw that the bandits' horses had been directed directly into the shaft.

Leaving Frank and Bob to guard their horses, Ted, Bud, Ben and Kit entered the shaft.

They had not proceeded more than five or six rods when the shaft took a square turn to the right, and descended at a gentle slope.

Down this decline went the young rough riders, until they suddenly came to a dead wall.

The shaft had come to an end!

In no direction but from the way they had come was there an opening in the rocky wall.

With a flaming match Ted bent to examine the ground.

Tracks of horses' hoofs were plentiful. It looked as if a dozen horses had stood close together at the extreme end of the passage.

"Perhaps they came in here an' then went out again," said Bud Morgan.

"No; they did not go out again!" replied Ted, with a note of conviction in his voice.

"Then where in sand hill be they?" questioned Bud.

"That is for us to find out," replied Ted.

CHAPTER V.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

It was certainly a knotty problem that the young rough riders had before them to unravel.

They had tracked the retreating outlaws into the shaft of a deserted mine, only to find that the passage into the mountain was but a few rods in length, and ended in a solid wall.

It really looked as if the bandits and their horses must have melted into thin air.

For two hours Ted and his companions sounded every inch of the walls of the old mine shaft from the entrance to the extreme end of the passage. They were certain that there were no hidden or secret passages.

Then the search was given up for the night. The young rough riders decided to camp in the entrance to the mine shaft and wait until morning, hoping that the coming of another day would bring ideas that would help to solve the mystery.

A fire was started outside of the shaft, and the horses were staked out where they could reach the grass, which grew in bunches upon the sandy plain.

During the afternoon Kit Summers and Ben Tremont had shot several game birds, and the boys enjoyed an extra fine supper.

Frank O'Melia, in particular, seemed to have developed an enormous appetite. The young Easterner did not appear to have become as fatigued by the rigorous riding

and excitement he had been through in the last eighteen hours as might have been expected.

During the supper Ted asked Frank how he had enjoyed the trip, so far.

When Frank had swallowed a huge piece of broiled sage hen which he was masticating, he answered:

"This is buns and griddle cakes for me. I wouldn't have missed appearing in this act for all the door admissions. Won't mother stare when her only gets back home?"

"Mebbe yer won't like it so durn much when yer hev been up against a real tough proposition. It's all been kid's play so fer," said Bud Morgan.

"As Shakespeare would remark: 'And then, too late, he will repent and wish he had hold of papa's hand again,'" put in Bob Martin, without a suspicion of a smile upon his face.

Frank dropped a chicken bone into the fire and gazed at Martin in amazement. Then his eyes roamed about the company. Not one of the young rough riders appeared to have heard what Martin had said.

Frank pinched himself. "Wake up, old carcass," he muttered, "and take an observation. Methinks we are in the wrong latitude."

The boys could not help bursting out into roars of merriment.

Between Bob Martin and Frank O'Melia, the trip promised to be a merry one, notwithstanding the serious errand they were upon.

The boys were seated in a complete circle about the camp fire as they ate, and they had hardly ceased laughing at the comical remarks of Bob and Frank, when they were suddenly startled by the report of a rifle shot from far above their heads.

At the same moment a bullet struck the center of the camp fire, scattering sparks and burning brands in every direction!

Of course, the young rough riders jumped quickly back, but not until Ted had glanced quickly upward, and had seen the heads of three of the bandits withdraw from the brink of the precipice far above them.

The shot had showed the boys where the bandits were located, but they had not yet discovered the way they had taken to gain their position.

It was clear that the neighborhood of the camp fire was dangerous.

With a few well-aimed kicks with their boots, Bud and Ted kicked the burning branches of the fire close to the side of the mountain, and added fresh wood to make it continue burning.

It grew dark quickly from then on, and it was probably two hours later that Kit Summers suddenly uttered an exclamation, grabbed his rifle, and stood up.

Down the sandy plain, walking parallel with the mountain range, he had seen the dusky form of a human being approaching the camp.

Kit raised his rifle and called, "Halt!"

The shadowy form stopped immediately, and then the young rough riders heard a plaintive, almost womanly, voice come from the darkness.

"Please, sirs, I am only a boy. I am in trouble, and have been looking for a long time for some human being to help me."

CHAPTER VI.

AN INGENIOUS TRAP.

As Ted heard the plaintive voice in the darkness, his heart, always as gentle as a good woman's, went out toward the wretched lad.

"Come to the fire, my boy," he said.

A second more the owner of the pleading voice was standing in the full light of the camp fire.

It was a slender figure that the eyes of the young rough riders rested upon, clad in ragged clothes that seemed to be several sizes too large for the wearer.

From beneath the tattered, old hat peeped locks of raven-black hair. The eyes were red and swollen, as if from weeping, and the face seemed pinched and thin.

The boy seemed to be not over thirteen or fourteen years of age.

As the stranger approached the fire, Ted asked, gently: "What is the trouble you spoke about, my lad? Perhaps we can help you."

"Oh, if you only would, sir!"

"Well, then, tell us the story."

The story that the lad told was one to turn a heart of stone, and it was delivered in such a way that any one of the young rough riders would have been willing to have fought the man who would express a doubt as to the boy's truthfulness.

According to the boy, his mother and himself had been captured by a band of outlaws some weeks before, and had finally managed to escape.

With no horses, no weapons and no knowledge of the country, they had wandered about the mountains for over

a week, living upon what berries they had been able to gather. At last, while trying to climb down a ragged slope of rocks, the mother had fallen and broken her arm.

With great trouble the lad had assisted his mother to walk about two miles to a deserted cabin in the mountains, which they had seen that day. Then the lad had left his mother with a small supply of berries and had started to look for help.

In that unfrequented part of the mountains he had hardly hoped to find any human beings, but had finally followed a sort of canyon, until he had reached the desert plain.

In the darkness he had been attracted by the camp fire of the young rough riders, and had dragged his feet to the place in the hope of at least finding help for his mother.

When the lad had finished there were tears in Ted's eyes, and he jumped quickly to his feet.

"My boy," he said, "could you lead a couple of us to the cabin in which your mother is staying?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Can you travel the distance now?"

"Oh, yes. I wish to get to her as quickly as possible."

"Can we ride there?"

"Only a little of the way," was the lad's reply. "It would be better to walk."

"All right," concluded Ted; "lead the way. Come on, Bud, you had better go with me, while the rest of the boys guard the camp and wait here for us to return."

Very soon Ted and Morgan were following the footsteps of the boy back along the plain, following the irregular line of the steep mountain side.

For about two miles they thus followed the mountains, and then their young guide turned into a canyon and lead them toward the heart of the mountain range.

Here the way seemed extremely difficult, and they saw that it would have been impossible to have proceeded up the gulch on horseback.

After going up the gulch for half a mile, the lad turned toward the left wall of the canyon and appeared about to try to scale the almost perpendicular wall.

As they drew close to the wall, however, the rough riders saw that a very narrow and dangerous ledge of rocks started at the foot of the wall and continued clear to the top.

Up these rocks the boy was scrambling, and Ted and Bud followed as fast as possible.

At the top of the wall the men came to a small, rocky table-land, at the further side of which, nestled in a niche of the mountain, the walls of which seemed to furnish two walls for the cabin, they espied a little, log and stone house.

A dim light was visible in the one window, but no one could be seen stirring within.

"There is the cabin. There, where the light is. I hope we are not too late to help my mother."

The young lad's voice seemed to tremble with deep emotion as he said these words, but, had it been light enough, and had our friends been looking at the boy's face, they would have seen a fiendish smile lurking about the corners of the youth's mouth and a revengeful gleam in his eyes.

Nearing the cabin, Ted rushed ahead and opened the door. Bud was close behind.

As the two rough riders stepped over the threshold, there was suddenly a terrible crash!

Ted glanced behind him, and saw Bud Morgan falling to the floor unconscious, while behind Bud's falling form stood the boy who had guided them there, an uplifted crowbar in his hands.

As the men had entered the door, the boy had dropped behind and had picked the crowbar up from the long grass, where it had probably been previously secreted.

As Ted involuntarily jumped toward his falling companion, he heard a quick step in the rear.

He started to turn about, but it was too late!

Before he could whirl around the stock of a clubbed rifle, in the hands of no other person than Frank Casse, the leader of the bandits, landed upon Ted's head, rendering him immediately unconscious.

It was some minutes before Ted returned to consciousness, and then he found himself securely bound, hand and foot.

He heard the voice of Frank Casse talking in another corner of the room, and did not move immediately. Casse's first words were:

"That was fine work that you accomplished, Mamie. You certainly know how to play the part of a young boy to perfection."

"Well, I ought to know how to do it by this time, Frank," another voice was heard to say. "I was an actress long before I ever met you."

It was the voice of the person who had guided the two rough riders to the cabin.

Instantly it flashed upon Ted's mind that he and Bud Morgan had walked right into a specially contrived trap.

The person whom he had thought was a boy in trouble was really a woman in disguise—and she had played her part to perfection.

Then he knew the identity of the woman a moment later, for he heard Casse say: "Mamie, you are a wife to be proud of."

It was but a few minutes later that Casse turned his attention to his prisoners, and he found immediately that Ted Strong had regained consciousness.

He approached our hero at once.

Ted saw that the leader of the outlaws had changed little in personal appearance since he had first seen him. He still had the same piercing eyes and the handsome mustache, and he still wore the rich clothes that he had worn when Ted first fell into his hands.

But Casse did not come toward our young hero with the same bland smile with which he had greeted Ted when the young rough rider first found himself in the hands of the Mojave Terrors.

Casse now had a smile upon his lips, but it was a different one.

The smile with which he now greeted Ted was a revengeful, malicious one, and the eyes of the outlaw gleamed with the fires of vengeance.

He gloated over the disarmed and securely bound young rough rider for several moments before he spoke, and then his voice was cold and hard.

"So you would not heed my warning?" he asked, sneeringly. "You seemed to think that you were smarter than Frank Casse. Once you succeeded in thwarting my plans, but that can never be again. Once, when you were in my power, I saved your life. I gave you a hope of life. I intended holding you for a ransom. I made a mistake. But I will not make that mistake again. You are again in my power, and I have sworn that you shall die."

The outlaw paused for a moment, as if to note what effect his words would have upon the young rough rider.

Ted was gazing into the eyes of the band chief without a change of countenance. Not an eyelash trembled.

"Ah! You seem to think that your usual good luck will stay by you. Because you have had many narrow escapes, and have always succeeded in cheating death, you do not fear my threats. But I will show you. You shall not see the light of another day!"

Casse was looking straight at Ted as he made these remarks, and, as he concluded, he was amazed to see a smile spread across the features of the young rough rider.

The smile had been forced, had Casse known it, but it looked natural.

"You think that your friends will follow you here in time to save you?" almost shrieked the enraged villain.

"I have not said what I thought," replied Ted, quietly.

"I demand that you answer my question," shouted Casse.

"My friend, I am not deaf," remarked Ted.

"Answer my question."

"What if I refuse?"

"You shall die."

At this Ted laughed. It was a natural laugh, too.

"But you have said that I am to die, anyway. I refuse to answer any and all questions you may ask me," said Ted.

Ted had been lying upon the floor during this dialogue, and Frank Casse had been standing over him. As Ted delivered the last sentence, the outlaw advanced and gave our hero a hard kick with his heavy boot.

"D——n you!" he hissed. "You shall not have an easy death!"

Bud Morgan had returned to consciousness just in time to see the cruel kick delivered by Casse.

"Yer air a dirty coward!" shouted Bud.

"Shut your mouth or I'll fill it full of boots!" returned Casse. "You can both begin saying your prayers, for, in less than an hour, you will be ready to put on wings."

The outlaw then started across the room and said a few words to his wife.

The woman, still dressed in her disguise as a boy, hastily left the cabin.

She was gone about fifteen minutes and when she returned she was accompanied by two of Casse's bandits.

At a motion from their leader, the men stooped and picked up the helpless leader of the young rough riders.

At the same moment, Casse touched a hidden spring in the rocky wall of the cabin toward the mountain side, and a section of the rock opened, disclosing to view a room built in the mountain side beyond.

Ted was carried into this room, and he saw at once that it was devoid of furniture.

A dingy lantern, hung in the wall, shed a dim light over the room, and at one side Ted saw a large, iron water pipe entering the room through the stone wall.

As Ted was laid, not too gently, down upon the rock floor of this room, he noticed that the crowbar with which Frank's wife had felled Bud Morgan had been placed in one corner of the room.

Ted was not long left alone, for very soon Bud Morgan was brought into the room and laid beside him upon the floor.

The bandits then retreated, and a second later the boys heard a sharp click and knew that the rock connecting their new prison with the cabin had been closed.

As the rock clicked shut, Bud Morgan rolled over toward his friend, and with a great effort cut the bands that held Ted's hands.

"Where did you get the knife?" asked Ted, in surprise.

"I managed to grab it in my teeth," replied Morgan, "out of one of ther fellers' belts, jest as he laid me down. Then I rolled over quick, ter hide it."

"Bully for you!" said Ted.

His hands now being free, it took but a moment for Ted to free Bud Morgan, and the two rough riders were soon on their feet and examining their prison.

"This ain't no chicken house of a place ter get out of," remarked Bud Morgan, as he made an examination of the walls.

"No," replied Ted; "it's good and strong, but I have a hope of working through the wall somewhere. The villains, probably unintentionally, left a crowbar behind."

"By gosh, thet's so," exclaimed Bud, making a bee line for the corner of the room.

Bud suddenly halted in the middle of the room, however.

His ears had caught a great rumbling sound, seemingly coming from the heart of the mountain.

"Great lizards!" he exclaimed. "Say, Ted, do yer hear thet?"

Ted nodded.

"What do yer s'pose it is?" asked Bud.

Bud required no answer from Ted, for at that moment a large stream of water came pouring into the room through the large, iron pipe in the wall!

"Great scorpions!" Bud exclaimed. "I see ther plan of thet French devil now. He wants ter drown us like rats in er hole."

As the water began flowing into the room, Ted became suddenly active.

"Hurry up, Bud!" he called out. "Stop up that pipe, if you can."

As Bud sprang toward the pipe, Ted grabbed the crowbar and began poking the walls of the prison.

The water was flowing rapidly into the room, and was soon a foot deep all over the floor.

Great beads of sweat started out upon the face of Bud Morgan as he fruitlessly endeavored to stop up the pipe.

The water had a tremendous pressure, having come from a reservoir much higher up in the mountain than where the cabin was located.

It dropped with such force that Bud could not hold his hand under the pipe, much less force anything into it.

Up, up, up, higher and higher, rose the water. It was up to their knees now.

Ted, with the crowbar, worked like a demon.

Perspiration rolled out of every pore in his body.

At last, in very weariness, Ted dropped the crowbar from his hands and leaned for a moment against the wall, all but unconscious.

Then with a mighty effort he aroused himself, and saw that his last few strokes with the crowbar had made an impression on the stone wall. He had been working on the side toward the cabin.

Every moment the rushing waters were rising higher and higher.

Ted again seized the crowbar, and dealt the wall another succession of smashing blows!

Suddenly, as he gave a stronger poke than usual, his heart leaped with joy, for the iron bar had almost slipped from his hand.

It had penetrated the stone wall!

A huge flake of rock had become dislodged, and with another hard thrust the piece of rock fell away and the surging water began to flood the cabin in which the two rough riders had been captured.

CHAPTER VII.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

Ted and Bud Morgan were now in no danger of drowning.

The hole which Ted had made in the stone wall was larger than the pipe through which the water was entering the room, and they could see that the water in the room was gradually lowering.

But they were far from out of danger.

They were still prisoners.

In front of them was the cabin, and they could hear voices above the roar of the water that told them that their enemies were not far away.

They were unarmed, and, were they out of the flooded room in the side of the mountain, they would still be unable to fight the bandits or defend themselves.

The hole in the stone wall, through which the water was now finding an outlet to the cabin, while large enough to carry off the flood of water, was not large enough to permit the passage of a human body.

Still that seemed to be the only passage through which our friends could hope to escape.

Turning these facts over in his mind, Ted determined to make the hole larger, and set at once to work again with the crowbar.

It was tedious and laborious work, and Bud soon offered to "spell" his companion.

Taking turns, the two men worked with the crowbar for fully an hour before they finally decided that the hole was large enough to admit the passage of their bodies, one at a time.

"Shall we make a rush for it?" asked Ted, finally.

"Jest as yer say," answered Bud. "I'll foller wherever yer leads ther way."

"All right; I know you are dead game clear through, Bud; but do you think that is the best move we could make?"

"They don't seem to be no other chance, do they, Ted?" asked Morgan.

"I guess not," replied Ted. "Well, here goes!"

As he spoke, Ted suddenly threw himself upon the floor, lying at full length in the foot of water that remained in the room.

He lay a moment at full length upon the floor, facing the hole, through which the water was pouring from the room.

To pass through the hole, the young rough rider would be obliged to immerse his head.

Ted took a long, deep breath, and then squirmed toward the opening.

Bud was close behind him, and the next minute both rough riders were standing up in the cabin.

They were alone and in darkness.

When the flood of waters rushed into the cabin, Frank Casse, his wife and the two bandits must have beaten a hasty retreat.

But the outlaws were not far away, for their voices, commenting upon the breaking loose of the waters, could be heard in front of the cabin.

The door of the cabin was open, and the water was rushing over the threshold in a current that would almost take a man off his feet.

As Frank stumbled across the room, his hand touched the edge of a table.

Feeling over the surface of the table, he rejoiced at finding that his belt, containing his knives and revolvers, as well as cartridges, all intact, had been left lying upon the table by the outlaw chief.

Buckling his belt to his waist, he made another survey of the table and found Bud Morgan's belt and weapons, all but his knife.

Bud's knife was missing, but the scout was not without a blade, for he still had the one he had so deftly stolen from the outlaw.

The rough riders felt that they had a new lease of life, when their fingers fondly grasped their weapons once more.

The prospect for getting away from the outlaws was still slim, but their prospects had grown much brighter than they were before their weapons had been found.

Listening for a moment to the sounds of the voices of the outlaws, so as to be posted as to the location of their foes, Ted, followed by Bud, suddenly made a dash through the door, firing their weapons as they passed the threshold!

Ted had resolved to run the gantlet!

It was a desperate chance, but absolutely the only one open to the rough riders.

The darkness was somewhat of a protection, but not much, as it was just beginning to get daylight.

The first shots fired by Ted and his companion had been in the air, and were fired more to surprise and rattle the outlaws than to do any mischief.

But Ted fired a second shot as he reached the open air. This shot was directly toward one of the bandits, who stood directly in the young rough rider's path.

As the bullet was sent on its mission, the bandit at whom Ted had aimed fell dead to the ground! The bullet had taken him square between the eyes!

At the same instant, Bud Morgan's revolver had also spoken a second time, but his aim was poor and the shot went wild.

Ted sprang forward again, after his second shot.

He had not taken five steps when, right before him, out of the darkness, stepped Frank Casse, the bandit chief, each hand stretched out toward the young rough rider.

And in each hand was a cocked revolver!

"Stop! Stop, or die!" commanded Casse.

Frank did not for a second stop his flight. With a great bound he reached Casse, and, as the fingers of the outlaw leader pulled the triggers of his revolvers simultaneously, almost in Ted's face, the young rough rider reached out his free hand, his fist tightly clinched.

Ted's closed fist landed right between the Frenchman's eyes, and Frank Casse fell like a log!

There was the sound of but one report, for both of Casse's revolvers exploded at once, and two holes were made by the bullets in the rim of Ted's sombrero.

Without stopping to note how seriously he had injured Casse, Ted continued his retreat, closely followed by Bud.

On across the rocky plain they ran, and, as they pushed on over the route they had taken to reach the cabin, several hours before, six or seven shots from the remaining bandits flew after them.

They were now protected to a greater extent by the darkness, however, and every shot went wild.

Ted intended to make directly for the place where he had left his companions, at the edge of the sandy plain and near the entrance to the deserted mine shaft, but something happened before himself and Bud had reached the gulch, that made it necessary for him to change his mind.

As they were retreating rapidly down the trail toward the gulch, Ted heard several shouts directly ahead.

The shouts came from other members of the bandit company, and they were asking their friends at the cabin what was the cause of the shots.

"The prisoners have broken away! They are coming your way—straight toward the gulch! Head them off!"

These were the answering shouts coming from the lips of Frank Casse, who had apparently quickly recovered from Ted's assault.

The rough riders suddenly found themselves between two fires!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD CRATER.

As the rough riders heard the shouts of the bandits and realized that they had foes both in front and behind, they naturally paused for a moment to collect their thoughts and think of some way of eluding their foes.

In the darkness they could see no way of escape. The rocky plain was not wide—hardly wider than a good carriage roadway.

It was bordered on either side by tall, perpendicular walls of smooth rocks.

They were about halfway between the cabin and the gulch when they paused, and they could now hear the footsteps of the outlaws, as the heavy heels of the men's boots clicked against the rocky floor of the barren plain.

Suddenly Bud pulled Ted's sleeve.

"There be some big rocks over ter the right, here, pard," he said.

It was true. There were several large bowlders rising from the ground and standing out a few yards from the rocky wall.

Behind these the two rough riders crept, with an idea of using the bowlders as breastworks in case they were obliged to defend themselves.

They hoped, however, that the bandits, coming from the direction of the gulch, would pass by them and continue on toward the cabin.

In this they were disappointed, for it happened that the two parties of Casse's men met directly opposite the rocks behind which our friends had taken a stand.

They could hear the bandits conversing together.

"Where could they have gone?" they heard Frank Casse exclaim.

"They wa'n't no fellers passed by us," said one of the bandits who had come from toward the gulch.

"You are all fools!" the leader finally exclaimed. "But they must be somewhere around here, and we'll get them yet. That Ted Strong must die!"

"What's ther matter with their bein' back of them rocks there?"

The question came from another of Casse's men.

It was fast growing daylight now, and the outlines of the rocks behind which our friends had hidden could be plainly seen by the bandits.

"Certainly; of course, that is where they are!" exclaimed Casse.

Just as Casse had ordered his men to make an advance toward the big bowlders, Bud Morgan, who had been standing with his back against the mountain wall, gave a grunt of surprise.

His shoulders had been resting against a piece of rock that jutted out from the wall, and he had suddenly pressed back against the rock with considerable force.

His grunt of surprise had come when he suddenly found that a huge section of what seemed solid rock had swung inward, disclosing to view a large cavity in the mountain side.

Ted glanced around as he heard Bud's low exclamation.

"Into the cave, quick!" the young rough rider exclaimed.

With two bounds, Ted followed Morgan into the cave and then helped Bud swing back the large slab of rock, which formed the door to the hidden cave.

When the rock swung back into its regular place, the

rough riders were surprised to find that there was a small crack in the rock, through which they could see the large bowlders behind which they had just been hiding.

Watching through this crack, Ted saw the bandits come behind the bowlders, and then he heard them report to their leader that the rough riders were nowhere in sight.

It was evident that the outlaws had no knowledge of the hidden cave, and Ted could not help giving a sigh of satisfaction when he found that their hiding place was not apt to be discovered immediately.

While Ted had been watching the actions of the outlaws through the small crack in the wall, Morgan had been doing some exploring in the back of the cave.

Now the older man came forward with the surprising information that it was not merely a cave they were in, but a long, wide but natural passage into the mountain that they had discovered.

"Have you any idea where the passage leads to?" asked Ted.

"No," was the reply. "It's too durn dark ter tell, but I opine it goes right down inter the heart of the mountain."

"Well, there is no use staying caged up here," replied Ted. "Casse and his men will keep searching for us for an hour or more, anyway. We might as well put in our time exploring this passage; eh?"

"You bet," was Bud's reply. "No tellin' what we may run across thet will be a help fer us later."

"I only wish we had a pine knot or something for a torch," said Ted. "It will be rather unsatisfactory knocking around this rocky passage in the dark, and I haven't any too many matches."

"Durn me fer an old fool!" exclaimed Morgan, suddenly.

"Why, what's the matter now?" asked Ted.

"Why, here we be gropin' aroun' in the devil's darkness, an' me with two whole candles in my coat pocket!"

"You have two candles?" asked Ted, eagerly.

Bud was feeling through his pockets by this time, and finally announced that he had found the two candles, but that one of them was broken into two unequal parts, while nearly a third of the other one was smashed too much to be of use.

Then came a trial of lighting matches. One after another of Ted's supply was tried and thrown away as useless. His drench in the water had spoiled his matches.

Bud came forward again with an expedient in the shape of a flint and steel, which he dug up from an inner pocket.

In a few moments the end of one of the candles had been lighted, and, as the rough riders glanced around, they saw that the cave in which they were standing was indeed a roomy one.

The cave proper extended several rods into the face of the mountain, and then to the right they found a wide, high passage leading off diagonally down and into the mountain.

The descent was gradual, and the floor of the passage was almost as smooth as a city pavement.

Along the floor Ted noticed many places where pieces of upshooting rock had been chipped away.

The walls and ceiling of this rocky cavern were rough and natural, but it was evident that the hand of man had been instrumental in smoothing the floor.

As the passage descended into the mountain, they found it to be winding, and the descent was so gradual that a team of horses could have easily hauled a light wagon up the passage.

Down the passage Ted and his companion traveled for more than half an hour, without finding a break in the wall, a widening of the passage or an obstruction in their way.

Suddenly Ted gave an exclamation of surprise, for far below them he saw a ray of light slanting into the passage.

The two rough riders quickened their pace, and in ten minutes had descended to where the sunlight was flickering upon the rocky walls and floor of the cavern.

They fully expected to find themselves in the open air on reaching the spot.

As they stepped out of the passage, a grand and wonderful sight met their eyes!

They found themselves in a large cavity of the mountain!

On every side, stretching high above them for hundreds of feet, were perpendicular walls of rock, almost conelike in shape, while at the top was a circular opening through which they could see the blue sky and the shining sun.

"An old crater!" exclaimed Ted, gazing about.

"I reckon that's jest what it be," returned Morgan.

CHAPTER IX.

BEN TREMONT'S DISCOVERY.

After Bud Morgan and Ted Strong had left their companions to go with the supposed boy to assist his mother, Ben Tremont took command of Ted's company and ar-

ranged a shift of watches for guarding the camp during the night.

Himself and Bob Martin were to remain on guard during the first half of the night, and Ben Tremont and Frank O'Melia were then to be awakened to remain on duty until morning.

The young rough riders did not know at just what time their young leader and Morgan would be apt to return, and at daylight they were not surprised that they had not got back.

"No telling what condition Ted may have found the woman in," said Ben. "He may have found her too weak to move. We will probably hear from him before noon, and I guess we had better stay right here until we do."

So saying, Ben began doing his share of the work toward preparing breakfast.

After the meal was finished Ben suddenly took it into his head to once more visit the interior of the old mine shaft. He could not drive from his mind the mystery of where the outlaws had so suddenly disappeared, after riding, or leading, their horses up close to the blank wall.

As Ben entered the mine shaft he thought he heard the sound of gurgling water, but the sound was so indistinct that he soon dismissed it from his mind.

As he neared the end of the shaft, he was walking rapidly, but suddenly stopped short with an exclamation that speedily brought his companions to the spot.

Ben had halted upon the very brink of a yawning chasm!

Another step and he would have plunged, no telling how far, down into the dark and dismal pit!

The young rough riders could hardly believe their eyes when before them they saw a yawning chasm, where, the evening before, had been seemingly solid ground.

"Will somebody kindly reassemble my parts?" asked O'Melia. "I've seen Kellar make orange trees grow up out of Japanese tea cups, but I'm willing to wear a barrel to a dance if any of you cow teasers will tell me how a hole like this came to grow here in one night."

"As my old friend, Shakespeare, once said: ''Tis passing wonderful. Where once mine eyes beheld nothing but solid rock, I now see a big hole in the ground,'" slipped in Bob Martin.

"I'm glad to note that you really know a hole in the ground when you see one," jested Kit Summers.

"It's a wonder he didn't take the hole for an Indian mound, or a statue, or something," said O'Melia.

"You are not the only stone in the crusher, and you don't need to think so just because you're cracked!" exclaimed Bob.

This created a laugh, for it was an unexpected departure for Bob. It was expected that he was coming back at Frank with another alleged quotation from Shakespeare.

O'Melia was just starting to say something as Bob Martin started his "come-back" at him, and now Ben Tremont asked:

"What were you starting to say, Frank?"

Ben thought that O'Melia was about to make a remark that bore upon the discovery of the chasm—a theory, perhaps, to account for the mystery, but he was mistaken.

"Just talking to myself," Frank answered, "and held the receiver too close to my ear. But open the lid and let me look in. What's your think on this proposition? Who put the hole in the floor?"

"It's a mystery too deep for me to solve," replied Ben.

"Well, let's throw Shakespeare's press agent into the hole and find out how deep the old well is!" exclaimed O'Melia, suddenly grabbing Bob around the waist.

Bob was one of the strongest members of the young rough rider's company, and like lightning he turned and had wrapped his arm about Frank's neck.

O'Melia also struggled, but he soon saw that the young giant whom he had tackled was too much for him to handle.

"I'll cash in, Bob," he called out; "you can take the pot!"

"Bit off a little more than you could chew that time, eh?" inquired Martin, as he laughingly released the Irish boy.

"Perhaps I did," returned Frank, as quick as a flash, "but you didn't find me fool enough to try to swallow it, did you?"

"Well, fellows, let's cut out the fooling and try and solve this mystery," said Ben Tremont. "I believe this is an important discovery. It may show us how the bandits made their way out of here, but it hardly seems possible that they could have taken their horses down into that pit."

"But there was no hole there last night?" put in Kit.

"Well, have you any theory concerning this mystery?" asked Ben of his companions in general.

Nearly all the forenoon the young rough riders talked and speculated over the mystery. Finally Ben Tremont exclaimed:

"Boys, get all your lariats and tie them together. I am going to let you lower me down into that hole. I will at

least, perhaps, find out how deep it is and what is at the bottom of it."

Ben's direction was quickly complied with, and in a few moments the young rough riders entered the mine shaft and began lowering Ben Tremont into the hole.

Foot after foot of the strong, buckskin rope was let out, until about twenty yards had passed through their hands.

Then they heard a muffled voice from the inky darkness below say: "All right, boys; I have struck bottom. Ease up on the rope and keep it hanging until I give the word to haul away."

For half an hour the boys waited to hear from their companion in the hole, and then they heard his voice again.

"Are you still there?"

"Yes," they answered.

"I have discovered a passage through the rocks and am going to explore it. Don't worry if you don't hear from me for an hour."

"All right; we'll listen for you to get back," was the reply of Kit Summers.

It was nearer an hour and a half than an hour when the young men who were gathered around the pit heard Tremont's voice again, and then they heard a command to "Haul away!"

Gradually, hand over hand, they pulled in the lariat, until just below them they finally saw the wide sombrero of their companion appear in view.

In another moment the man at the end of the lariat scrambled over the edge and to the solid rock.

Standing quickly up, he thrust out his hand to Kit Summers and inquired:

"Well, Kit, did you begin to expect I was never coming back?"

Kit nearly dropped to the ground in astonishment.

The voice he had heard was not the voice of Ben Tremont.

It was not Ben whom they had hauled from the hole, but their young leader, Ted Strong!

"Where in the dev——" Kit started to say, but was interrupted by Ted.

"All in good time, Kit. Just now you had better send that lariat back down the hole, for Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont are both below and are probably anxious to get up here with the rest of us."

CHAPTER X.

A NATURAL ELEVATOR.

As Ted and Bud Morgan passed out of the long descending passage leading through the mountain from the rocky plateau where the cabin was situated, into the bed of the old crater, they saw that there were several other passages, similar to the one they had been in, leading off into the sides of the mountain in various directions.

Passing across the crater bed, Ted discovered that there were hoof marks in the dust which had settled in the crater.

The hoof prints showed that a number of horses had recently passed along the crater, coming from a passage to the left and entering a passage to the right.

"Bud," exclaimed Ted, after a careful examination of the hoof prints, "those marks were made by the horses of Frank Casse's band!"

"Air yer sure?" asked Bud.

"I'm certain about it," replied the young rough rider, "for if you will notice you will see that one of the horses' hoofs left a very irregular mark, as if a piece of the hoof had been chipped off in front."

"So there be," said Bud, after a careful examination of a particular hoof print that Ted had pointed out.

"Well," continued Ted, "I noticed that circumstance before when we were following the hoof prints of the outlaws."

"Then yer must be right, Ted. Shall we foller these tracks?"

"I think it will be a wise move to try and ascertain how the bandits got into the mountain first," replied Ted. "By following the tracks in the direction from which they came, we may be able to solve the mystery of how the tracks suddenly disappeared in the old mine shaft."

After a cursory examination of the cave formed by the extinct volcano, Ted and his companion entered the passage from which the horses had entered the crater.

They had proceeded but a few steps when they found that the passage made a steep decline.

Down they followed the passage until they found themselves at least fifty-five or sixty feet below the level of the crater bed. Here they were surprised to find that the floor of the passage was covered by about four inches of water.

Here, however, the passage no longer descended, but made a direct turn toward the left and continued at a level.

As Bud and Ted splashed along in the water, they heard a sound from somewhere in front of them.

They stopped and listened.

Splash! splash! splash!

Some one was in the passage, coming directly toward them.

With drawn weapons, Ted and Bud stood still and awaited the approach of the coming person. The man they were awaiting soon came in sight, and then Ted uttered a quick exclamation and started forward.

He had recognized the person who was splashing along toward them to be Ben Tremont!

The three rough riders, when they met, compared notes and then they continued on along the passage, Ben Tremont turning back with Bud and the young leader of the rough riders.

Coming to the place to which Ben had been lowered by his companions, Ted tied the rope around his own waist and then gave Ben an order to instruct the boys above to "Haul away."

The boys had discovered how the outlaws had found a way into the mountain with their horses, but the mystery of how the horses had been lowered to the passage below was yet unsolved.

When Ted's party had all been gathered together again at the entrance to the shaft of the deserted mine, Ted told his companions of the trick that had been played upon himself and Bud by the alleged boy, who was really the wife of Frank Casse.

He also informed them of their narrow escape, the finding of the entrance to the secret passage, the discovery of the old crater, and all their experiences up to their meeting with Ben Tremont.

Then he proposed that a meal be prepared. Himself and Bud had had nothing to eat since the previous night, and the other young rough riders had been too busily engaged to think of getting dinner.

It was now nearly dark, and by the time supper had been prepared and eaten it was quite dusk.

Ted decided to take one more look at the end of the mine shaft before turning in for the rest he so much needed.

He had entered the shaft and had been out of sight from his companions for about two minutes, when they suddenly heard him calling for them to come into the shaft.

They soon joined him, and an astonishing sight met their gaze!

In the place where the big hole had been, no opening was now visible!

The mine shaft was the same as it had first appeared to them!

The floor seemed composed entirely of solid rock!

"What in sand hill——" Bud started to exclaim, but he was interrupted by Ted.

"Boys," said Ted, "I believe that the mystery is at last explained."

"You have arrived at a conclusion?" asked Ben Tremont.

"Yes; I believe that we have discovered a natural elevator."

"A natural elevator?" chorused several voices.

"How could that be?" asked Kit Summers.

Then Ted told them his idea of the matter, and, later, it was discovered that in nearly every particular Ted's solution of the mystery was correct.

"At the bottom of the shaft we found several inches of water, and in the passage leading down from the crater bed I noticed evidences of water having recently receded, showing that the water must have raised and fell back again. I believe that work on this deserted mine was discontinued on account of the water rising and falling so. In sinking the shaft, which is probably located just below the rocky floor at the end of this approaching passage, the miners had probably cut deep around the edges, and the rising water had forced the last thin layer of rock loose and carried it to the top of the shaft, as you now find it."

"But there should be some cracks around the edges of that layer of rock, if your theory is correct," put in Ben Tremont.

"There is a crack across the passage!" exclaimed Kit Summers, who had been minutely examining the floor.

"Yes, I discovered that when I first formed my theory," said Ted. "That crack must form the inner edge of the flat rock which composes the floor of the natural elevator. The other edges must lap under the walls of the passage."

"But how do yer account fer the rise and fall of ther water?" asked Bud Morgan.

"I can now think of but one way to account for that," replied Ted. "It is possible that there may be some underground connection between the water under this mountain and the Pacific Ocean."

"I'm wise!" suddenly exclaimed O'Melia. "You were about to pipe off that the ups and downs of the water here are caused by the rise and fall of the tide in the big drink."

"You are right," answered Ted. "That is my theory; but there may be some other explanation for the water thus rising and falling."

"Then, according to your theory," asked Kit Summers, "in a certain length of time this rocky platform, forming the floor of the elevator, will drop gradually to the position in which you found it when you approached from the crater?"

"Exactly," replied Ted; "and I figure that the outlaws rode their horses right onto the platform and sank with it to the bottom, then rode off into the passage leading to the crater. From the crater we could see that their horses' hoof marks went into another passage, which we have not yet explored. We will probably find that this latter passage leads to some plateau above, which has some connection with the rocky ledge where the cabin is located."

"Well, what do you propose for the next move?" asked Bob Martin.

"The elevator will probably not begin to descend until near morning," said Ted. "I propose that we get a good night's rest and be ready with our horses to take a ride when the tide goes out. We will force our way to where the outlaws are camped."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MOUNTAIN RECLUSE.

It was not yet daylight when Ted Strong and his companions were stirring about, preparing to take advantage of the fall of the natural elevator to gain the interior of the mountain caverns with their horses and all their accouterments.

The horses were saddled, the camping necessities packed away, and just before the break of day the young rough riders mounted their horses and rode into the mine shaft and upon the rocky platform.

They had not long to wait when they noticed that they were slowly descending to the depths beneath.

Ted had at least worked out a part of the mystery of the old mine shaft correctly.

The descent was slow, but at length the young rough riders were able to ride off from the elevator and into the passage leading to the old crater.

Ted rode in the lead, followed by Bud, and, after reaching the crater, he deemed it advisable not to at once start with the horses up the passage taken by the outlaws.

He decided to hide the animals in one of the branching passages, and first explore the passage taken by the bandits on foot.

The young rough riders accordingly dismounted and led their horses into the passage from which Bud and Ted had first entered the crater cavern.

Then, after looking well to their weapons, they followed their young leader into the passage where the hoof prints of the bandits' horses led.

As Ted had expected, it was found that the passage soon took an upward ascent, much steeper than the passage the young rough rider and Bud Morgan had explored the day before.

Up and up climbed the boys, until they at last came to a place where there opened a branch passage, considerably smaller than the one in which they were traveling, which led off in a diagonal direction to the left.

Telling his companions to wait where they were for a few minutes, Ted entered the smaller avenue for the purpose of making a superficial examination.

The young rough rider hardly expected to discover anything of particular importance in the passage he had just entered, but had taken the chance, because of his natural habit of making a thorough business of everything he undertook.

Ted had gone ten or twelve rods down the smaller passage without seeing anything more than might be expected, and he was just about to turn back to join his companions, when his quick ear caught the sound of a human voice.

The voice was heard but faintly, as if muffled by intervening walls. No words could be distinguished, but Ted knew that the person who was speaking was either in the passage he was following, or in some cave adjoining it, and further beyond where he had penetrated.

He listened for a moment until the sound of the voice suddenly ceased. Then he hurried along in the direction from which the sounds seemed to have come.

He went several rods further before he again heard the voice.

The voice was now plainer, but no words could be made out.

At the same moment that the noise of human utterances was heard the second time, Ted espied a light in the passage ahead. The light shone out into the passage as from a door or opening in one of its walls.

Quickly, but noiselessly, Ted darted forward and soon approached what he made out to be a door in the side wall of the passage, leading to another passage or to a room to the right.

Now he could hear the voice distinctly, and the words were audible.

Ted recognized the tone to be that of Frank Casse, the bandit chief!

"Don't tell me again, you old fossil, that you lost your money! I am not a fool. Give it to me, and I will set you free to go where you will. If I find it without your help, I will see that your throat is cut from ear to ear!"

Those were the first words Ted heard. Then a feeble voice, as from an old man, replied:

"Frank Casse, would you kill your own uncle in cold blood—your father's brother—the man who furnished the money to give you an education, who sent you through college, who clothed you while there, and who afterward gave you a start in life such as few men have had?"

"Oh, cut it out! I am not here to listen to any sermons. You didn't miss the money you spent on me. What I want is money now, and I want it bad. I am in a bad fix. I know that you have somewhere in this mountain hidden untold wealth. That is why I came here—to get money. You refused to give it to me at first. Now I am obliged to force you to dig it up."

Ted had now crept so closely to the door that he could see into the room beyond.

His eyes first rested upon an old man, seated in one corner of the room, upon a pile of blankets. He was thin and apparently quite feeble. His hair was snow-white and long and shaggy, while a long beard, streaked with gray, fell nearly to his waist line.

His fingers trembled as with the palsy as he looked up into the scowling face of the man he had termed his nephew, and tears were rolling down his furrowed cheeks.

"Frank," he said, "your greed for wealth has been your ruin. If you will promise to forsake your evil ways, I will give you a new start in business. I want you to be an honest man."

The only effect this speech seemed to have upon Frank Casse was to make him, if possible, more angry than ever.

He bent over the old man, with a clinched fist swinging menacingly in his uncle's face, and yelled: "You admit that you have lied, do you? You would set me up in business, and yet you said a moment ago that you had lost your money. You have it still! It is hidden somewhere in this mountain! Shell out the secret, or, d——n you, I'll——"

Frank Casse was trembling with passion. At that moment his hand shot out and grasped the old man by the throat.

The outlaw's sentence was not finished, however, for as he made the grab at his uncle's throat, the young rough rider sprang into the room and with one bound reached the bandit's side.

Ted's fist shot straight out from the shoulder and landed directly upon the outlaw's cheek.

Frank Casse went down as if he had been struck with a battering-ram!

Ted stooped to tie the villain's hand with a cord he had taken from his pocket, when he was arrested by the voice of the old man:

"Hold! I will not have my nephew bound!"

As Ted looked up he found himself looking directly into the barrel of a large horse pistol in the hand of the old man.

"Do you intend to shoot me after I have come to your rescue?" asked Ted.

"No; I will not shoot you if you will step aside and let my nephew rise to his feet."

"Let me disarm him first, then," said Ted.

"I will grant you that privilege," returned the old man, "but you must not harm my nephew. If you attempt to do so I will shoot."

Ted took the revolver and the knife from the sash about the outlaw's waist, finding them to be all the weapons on Casse's person. Then he stepped back and allowed the bandit leader to rise. All the time the dangerous weapon in the hands of the old man was covering him.

"Now, Frank, you had better get away as quickly as you can," said the old uncle. "I will see that this man does not follow you for some time."

Casse backed toward the door, an unutterable look of hate in his eyes as they rested upon the face of the young rough rider.

"Curse you," he said, as he passed through the door; "we will meet again very soon, and I promise I will yet have my revenge upon you!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD MAN'S STORY.

"Who are you, young man?"

The question was asked by the old man shortly after Casse, the outlaw leader, had passed through the door and disappeared along the passage without.

Ted did not hesitate to answer the question. He answered it willingly and readily, for he wanted to gain the confidence of the old man, who seemed to be persecuted by his wicked nephew.

"I am Ted Strong. Perhaps you have heard of the young rough riders?"

"Yes, I have heard of the young rough riders, but never supposed they visited this part of the country," replied the old man.

"We have not been in California long. In fact, this is our first trip to this part of the United States."

"You, then, are the leader of that remarkable company of young men?" asked the old man.

"Yes."

"I am glad to meet you, for I have heard much about you through a friend who resided in Texas up to a few months ago," continued the uncle of Frank Casse. "By the way, I made the first trip to a civilized town, after nine years of almost total solitude here in the mountains, on purpose to see that friend."

"Then you have been living here constantly?" asked Frank.

"Yes," replied the man.

"Will you tell me your name?"

"My name is John Casse," was the reply.

"Mr. Casse, just before I entered this room I overheard your nephew threatening to take your life unless you told him the secret of where your wealth is stored. I know your nephew to be a desperate and heartless villain. I want you to trust me, for I wish to protect you."

The old man was silent for a long time, and then he raised his head as if with sudden resolution, and replied:

"Ted Strong, I am a good judge of character. I would not have needed to have heard of your good deeds from others to be able to trust you. You are honest. I can tell that by your frank countenance and the look in your eyes. While I do not wish to bring harm to my nephew, I am really in fear of my life. I will tell you my story.

"I am a bachelor. Years ago my brother and I were rivals for the hand of the same girl. She married my brother, and Frank Casse was their only child. When Frank was fifteen years of age, my brother died, leaving his widow in destitute circumstances. I asked her to marry me and she refused. She also refused to allow me to furnish her with means for living well, but she finally consented to allow me to educate the boy and send him through college. When Frank was twenty-one I furnished him a large sum of money and he went into business in one of the most prosperous towns of the middle West.

"During his college career, Frank had led a wild life, and I foolishly had encouraged him in it by keeping him well supplied with spending money. After he went into business he seemed to prosper, and I thought he had sowed all his wild oats. He was finally elected an alderman in the town in which he lived, and was much respected.

"But one day he left his business and skipped out. He had become mixed up in a large bribery case. The facts leaked out soon after his disappearance, but I suppose that from that day to this nothing has been learned in that city of his whereabouts.

"At the time of Frank's downfall, I was successfully operating some big mining interests in the West, and Frank came to me. He stayed with me for several years, during which time, by robbing me and by his extravagances, he almost ruined me financially. Finally, I started to sink a shaft in this mountain, there being good indications of finding gold here. I was driven out because of the mine continually flooding. You have probably discovered the natural elevator on the other side of the mountain?"

Ted nodded in assent.

"After I had deserted the mine proposition," continued the old man, "I accidentally discovered the passage leading to the old crater and the labyrinth of passages leading from there to different parts of the mountain.

"I was getting old and discouraged with life, and I decided to settle down in these mountains and end my days here in solitude, except for the occasional visits of Frank, my nephew. I first built a small cabin upon a ledge of the mountains, but deserted it later for some cave rooms along another passage, which I will show you later.

"Frank was not here much of the time, and he did not learn about all the passages. I deemed it best not to tell him all the secrets of this mountain, for I learned to fear my nephew and thought I might find it necessary to hide from his wrath at some time.

"When I settled down here, I turned all my property into cash and brought it here with me, but three weeks ago, when I went to a town for the first time in nine years, I took my money with me and deposited most of it in a bank, for safe-keeping. I was afraid that Frank would force me to give it up to him, as he endeavored to do today."

Ted was greatly interested in the old man's story, and when it was finished he told him about the experience himself and Bud Morgan had had in the stone-walled room back of the cabin on the ledge.

"That room," said the old man, "I built secretly for the

purpose of using to hide my gold, but at the last minute a stream of water broke through one of the walls, which, to save the cabin, I supplied with a large water pipe and put in a shut-off up above the roof of the cabin. On investigating, I found that the water did not come from a spring, but from a big, natural reservoir near the top of the mountain."

Ted then asked: "Are you willing to guide my friends and myself to where Frank Casse's men are located and help us with information that will make it easy for us to capture them without probable loss of life?"

The old man shook his head slowly.

"No," he finally said; "I will not help you to run my nephew or his friends to earth. Frank has done me many wrongs, but I will not turn against him now. You will have to find a way, yourself. For my part, I have decided to leave the old mountain for good very soon."

Up to this time the old man still held the old horse pistol in his hand, as if to delay the departure of the young rough rider, should Ted attempt to leave the room, but now he seemed to think that his nephew must be out of immediate danger, and he threw the weapon into a corner.

"Mr. Casse, I hope you will change your mind on this subject. We are bound to get your nephew, and, if possible, all his companions. You might simplify matters and save lives, perhaps, if you could only see it that way. I am going now to join my friends, who are waiting for me, but will return here in a few minutes."

Thus saying, Ted started back to where he had left the rest of the young rough riders.

Telling them of what he had seen and learned, Ted led them back to the room in which he had left the old man.

As he entered the room, Ted saw that the old man had gone. The room was empty, save for the pile of old blankets, upon which John Casse had been sitting when he talked to the young rough rider a few minutes before.

Ted gazed curiously about the room before his eyes saw the blankets. Then he made a rush toward that corner.

A small piece of paper had been pinned to one of the blankets, and upon it was written with a lead pencil the following words:

"TED STRONG: One warning I must give you. Don't go into the passage which has the white ceiling. It would mean almost certain death. JOHN CASSE."

CHAPTER XIII.

A COWARDLY ASSAULT.

Ted read the mysterious warning left by John Casse through twice and then handed it to Bud Morgan.

The rest of the young rough riders gathered around Morgan and read the message over his shoulder.

"Great colored lizards!" exclaimed Bud. "What do yer s'pose ther old bloke means by this 'ere passage with ther white ceilin'?"

"Do you suppose that it is a bluff, Ted, to keep you from entering some passage that may lead to the place where Frank Casse has hidden?" asked Ben Tremont.

"As Shakespeare would say, 'Perhaps he hath a motive quite concealed to scare us away from some particular part of this rotten old mountain,'" said Bob Martin.

"Perhaps the old boy was handing you a pipe dream about chasing his yellow boys into a money barn," said O'Melia. "Like as not he has the dough planted somewhere in the mountain and is trying to push our rudder over, so we won't accidentally drift up against his wealth."

"We can only solve the question by investigation," replied Ted, "but if we happen to run across a passage with a white ceiling, I think it will be very wise to proceed cautiously if we have occasion to enter it."

The boys did not consume much time in speculation on the subject, as they were anxious, now that Frank Casse had discovered the presence of their young leader in the mountain, to make a decided move against the outlaws before the bandits could make any arrangements for defense or retreat.

They immediately proceeded to the place in the main passage where they had waited for Ted while he was talking with the old man, and from there they continued their upward ascent toward the top of the mountain.

They had thus proceeded for several minutes when they came to a place where the main passage seemed to come to a sudden end, but branching from it were two passages, leading off to the right and left, much like the shape of the letter Y.

There was a brief consultation as to which passage should be taken and Ted finally decided to take the one toward the left first.

This passage was found to be very crooked, and did not seem to lead to the mountain top, as they had hoped.

It ascended for a few rods and then took a direction almost parallel to what they supposed was the line of the mountain above.

Then, after perhaps a quarter of a mile, there was an

abrupt turn in the passage and the young rough riders found themselves descending.

Ted called a halt and was about to suggest going back over their trail for the purpose of taking the other branch of the main passage, which led off to the right, when there came a piercing scream from somewhere below them.

Three times the scream was repeated, and then all was still again!

It was a woman who had shrieked—a woman who seemed to have been frightened rather than hurt.

In a moment the young rough riders were hurrying along down the passage, resolved to learn the reason of the screams.

They had not far to go, when they suddenly turned a square corner in the passage and found Frank Casse, the outlaw leader, standing over an inanimate form on the rocky floor of the cavern.

He was going through the pockets of the dead or unconscious man.

Directly behind the villain stood Casse's wife, still dressed in the costume which she had worn to lure the young rough rider and Bud Morgan to the mountain cabin.

It was the woman who had screamed—probably when she had first seen her husband attack the man who now lay at his feet.

The woman had now evidently recovered from her first fright, for she was holding a torch while her husband was searching his victim's pockets.

As the young rough riders suddenly appeared around the corner the woman was the first to see them.

With a startled exclamation she said something to her infamous husband and threw the torch to the floor, stamping upon it to put out the blaze, leaving the cave in total darkness.

Her quick-witted action probably saved the life of Frank Casse at that particular time, for several of the rough riders had drawn their weapons to fire upon him.

In the darkness, however, they lost sight of the man and refrained from firing at a word from Ted.

The young rough riders pushed right on in the darkness until they came to the inanimate form upon the floor.

As they had expected, they found that Casse and the woman had taken flight.

Ted would not allow any of his companions to strike a match until he was certain that the bandit and his wife were nowhere in the passage, for he suspected that Casse might possibly be waiting with revolver ready to fire upon the party as soon as the light was made.

Ted went down the passage, feeling his way along the rough wall, until he was certain the passage was clear except for himself and his companions, and then he gave an order to light up.

Kit Summers soon had the candle burning, which had been put out by a sudden rush of air as they had rounded the corner and had first seen the outlaw and his victim.

As soon as Ted looked upon the inanimate form upon the floor he recognized the man to be Frank Casse's old uncle, John Casse.

The man had been hit upon the temple with some hard, blunt instrument—probably the butt of a revolver.

Besides this marks upon his throat showed that he had been choked, and marks on his face gave evidence of his having been struck several hard blows, probably with his nephew's fist.

He was not dead, but it was evident he had not long to live.

He came to consciousness while Ted was bending over him trying to force some brandy between his thin lips.

He seemed to recognize the young rough rider at once, for his lips moved as if he were trying to speak.

Then he made several motions which indicated that he wished to be raised up.

Ted complied with his request.

With great difficulty the old man, with Ted's assistance, drew a narrow, flat book from an inner pocket. It proved to be, when opened, a check book on a well-known bank in Los Angeles.

The old man motioned that he wished to write, and Ted handed him an indelible lead pencil.

Slowly and apparently with great pain the old man filled out one of the blank checks and signed his name to it. Then the old man turned over several pages and upon another blank check wrote several words.

The last few words were written very slowly and with frequent pauses, as if he could hardly summon enough strength to hold the pencil.

While writing the old man's body shook violently. He dropped the pencil and leaned heavily back against Ted, who was supporting him.

Just for an instant the old man raised his eyes and looked at Ted—an earnest, pleading expression upon his face.

Then his thin hand suddenly clinched at his throat and

he bent over with a choking cough. Blood began flowing from his lips and a moment later he was dead.

Tenderly Ted laid the old man upon the floor and then took the check book in his hands and turned to where the old man had filled out a check.

He gave a gasp of astonishment.

The check was for two hundred thousand dollars, and was made out payable to the young rough rider.

He turned over several pages to the place where the old man had written the last few words, and this is what he read:

"Invest half toward establishing home for wayward boys and divide rest among young rough ri——"

The old man had not succeeded in finishing the sentence, but his meaning was plain. He wished to donate half his fortune in a charitable institution and the balance he wanted Ted to divide among the members of his company of young rough riders. He had made no will, but he had written a check for Ted to cash, and he trusted the young rough rider to carry out his wishes.

With what Ted knew of the circumstances, it did not require much deliberation to determine how the old man had met his death.

His nephew had killed him. Driven to desperation and madness by his uncle's continued denial of having any wealth hidden in the mountain, Frank Casse had probably grabbed the old man by the throat and choked him insensible, following this up by beating him in the face with his fist and then hitting him over the head with his clubbed revolver.

Frightened by the fury of her husband's assault, Casse's wife had, perhaps almost unconsciously, at first screamed, thus attracting the young rough riders to the spot.

"Boys," said Ted Strong, after he had carefully placed the check book in an inner pocket, "we must not rest another minute until we have revenged the death of this old man. Frank Casse must be captured. He must not be allowed to escape from this mountain alive."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BANDITS' CAMP.

Following their intrepid young leader, the young rough riders hastened back along the passage they had been following until they came once more to where the main passage from the crater bed to the top of the mountain split and forked in two directions.

They then took the opposite fork to the one which they had already explored to the place where they had found the outlaw leader bending over the prostrate form of John Casse.

This fork extended almost directly up to the top of the mountain, and the young rough riders had not followed it for more than ten minutes when they saw an opening above them and a spot of blue sky, which proclaimed that they were nearly to the top of the mountain.

A few seconds more and they approached the opening.

Crawling cautiously forward, Ted drew his head above the passage and discovered that the passage was in the center of a rocky plateau of about two acres in extent.

To the right, all along the mountain edge, arose rocky peaks several hundred feet higher than the plateau.

Directly in front, the plateau extended to the very edge of the mountain, while to the right the plateau was bounded by a large reservoir or lake of water.

This lake covered about three acres in extent, and Ted rightly guessed that it was from this reservoir that the water had come which so nearly came to drowning Bud Morgan and himself when they were imprisoned in the stone-walled room in the mountain side back of the little cabin.

Beyond the lake Ted could see a fringe of trees, and beyond the trees rose the rocky peaks which bordered the other side of the big mountain.

Rising lazily from the grove the young rough rider saw several wreaths of white smoke, proclaiming that in the grove were several camp fires.

Ted knew that he had located the camp of Casse's followers.

On the opposite bank of the lake Ted could see several rafts of logs tied close to the shore.

These, he surmised, were used by the bandits in crossing the lake. The bandits had camped upon the opposite shore of the lake, probably because there was no vegetation on this side, while upon the other there seemed to be abundance of grass for their horses.

At first it appeared to the young rough rider that no human being, besides his own companions, was in sight, but as he drew himself out of the mouth of the rocky passage and stood upon the floor of the plateau, he espied the crown of a man's hat just above a large bowlder a short distance away.

As his companions followed him to the plateau, Ted noiselessly approached the big rock, and, with a sudden spring, placed his hand upon the top of it and bounded over it.

He alighted right by the side of a very surprised member of Frank Casse's band.

Before the man could recover from his astonishment, Ted's strong fingers were at his throat.

It took the young rough rider but a minute to conquer the man, and the bandit was soon bound and helpless.

As Ted arose to his feet, after bending over the prisoner to secure the knots in the thongs with which he had bound the man's wrists, Ben Tremont uttered a sudden exclamation:

"Here they come!"

Ted glanced quickly across the lake.

Four men were on one of the rafts and about to push it into the lake by means of long poles.

The young rough riders were concealed from the sight of the men on the raft, being behind the large bowlder.

"Don't shoot at them," said Ted, "we want them to land so that we can get possession of the raft. When they have tied up the raft charge suddenly upon them."

Crouched behind the bowlder, the young rough riders watched the men as they approached on the raft.

It took the four outlaws nearly ten minutes to cross the lake, as they did not come directly, but hung close to the shore all the way around to the side on which Ted Strong and his companions were awaiting them.

At last, however, they drew up nearly opposite the hiding place of the young rough riders, and one of the outlaws waded to shore and pulled the raft up close to the bank by means of a stout rope, with which he then made the raft secure by tying it to a piece of jutting rock.

Then the other three bandits jumped from the raft to the rocky bank.

"Now is our time," said Ted, in a low voice.

Before the four outlaws suspected that their enemies were near, the young rough riders had rushed upon them with leveled weapons, while Ted Strong commanded: "Hands up, quick!"

Three of the bandits at once complied with the order, but the fourth seemed imbued with a determination to fight.

He quickly snatched a revolver from his belt and leveled it directly in the face of Kit Summers, his finger close to the trigger.

The outlaw had shown wonderful skill in drawing his revolver. It had been done with lightning-like quickness.

With a startled exclamation, Kit Summers, in dodging, fell headlong to the ground, just as the bandit's finger pressed the trigger.

The bullet sped over Kit's prostrate form and went singing dangerously near Ben Tremont's ear.

With a yell, the outlaw jumped toward Kit Summers' form and held the weapon close to the fallen man's head. He was intending to shoot again.

The barrel of his weapon was placed almost in Kit Summers' ear, and had the trigger been pulled Kit's brains would have been blown from his head.

But the man did not have time to fire, for Ted Strong had him instantly covered.

As Ted pulled the trigger the bandit fell lifeless over the body of Kit.

The bullet had taken him right back of the ear, and he had been killed so quickly that not a groan passed his lips when he fell.

In the meantime Bud Morgan and Bob Martin had secured the three other bandits.

"By George, that's what you might call a close shave," said Kit Summers, as he arose to his feet.

"You certainly did come close to getting a ticket good for the long doze," said O'Melia.

"As Shakespeare would say, you came near going to 'that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler ever comes sneaking back,'" put in Bob Martin.

"Well, we have got four prisoners and have five less bandits to cope with," replied Ted, "and that is worth a little excitement, so long as no one was really hurt."

"What is the next delicacy on the bill of fare?" asked Frank O'Melia.

"I think we had better take possession of the raft and sail across the lake," replied Ted. "There must be four more of the bandits, besides Casse and his wife. Casse may be over in the camp across the lake, or still in one of the mountain passages. We will clean up over there, anyway, first, and if we don't find him we will come back and search every passage in the mountain until we find him."

"Good," exclaimed Bud Morgan, starting toward the raft.

At that moment the young rough riders were startled by a sudden shot from behind them.

A bullet whizzed past the head of Ted Strong, just

barely burning his ear, and flattened itself against the side of the big bowlder.

Ted turned quickly around, just in time to see the figure of the outlaw's wife entering the passage in the mountain through which they had, a few minutes before, gained the plateau.

CHAPTER XV.

QUICK WORK.

When Ted Strong saw the retreating form of Mamie, the wife of Frank Casse, he rushed immediately to the mouth of the passage leading down into the mountain.

He got to the passage just in time to see the woman disappear around a turn in the passage.

His first inclination was to pursue her, but, on second thought, he desisted.

Ted wanted to make a clean sweep of the matter of doing up the bandits. He already had four prisoners, and he had every reason to believe that there were four more bandits in the camp across the lake.

He decided to attend to the matter of capturing these remaining followers of Frank Casse before re-entering the mountain in search of the leader and his wife.

He accordingly directed that the original plan be carried out.

Frank O'Melia and Bob Martin were left to guard the prisoners and watch the mouth of the passage for the reappearance of the woman or the chief of the bandits.

In a few moments, Ted, Bud, Kit and Ben were upon the raft, using the poles to push it toward the fringe of trees across the lake, where they knew the camp of the outlaws was located.

Nothing of note marked their progress until they were close to the opposite bank.

Then the bushes at the edge of the fringe of trees on the shore for which they were headed suddenly parted and three bandits stepped into view.

As they appeared in sight each of the outlaws held a rifle, all ready for action, at his shoulder.

"You have come far enough," one of the villains announced. "We have you covered and intend to shoot you down like dogs."

As he spoke the rifles were drawn closer to the shoulders of the outlaws, and Ted knew that the men were only awaiting an order to shoot.

Quietly Ted gave a low order to his companions: "Jump into the water!"

The four rough riders dropped their long poles and sprang into the waters of the lake.

At the same moment that they jumped the three rifles in the hands of the outlaws were discharged.

The sudden action of the rough riders, however, had disconcerted the aims of the bandits and only one of their bullets took any effect at all.

One of the leaden messengers hit Ben Tremont in the fleshy part of his right forearm, but it did not discommode the young giant until later. In fact, Ben did not realize that he had been touched by the bullet until he had climbed out of the water and saw a few drops of blood upon his sleeve.

As soon as Ted Strong and his companions struck the water they dived deep below the surface.

The thought flashed through the mind of Ted Strong as he dived that the drenching would render the weapons of his party useless, and he knew that they would have to use great caution in attacking their armed foes.

Ted calculated to rise from the water as close to the raft as possible, and it happened that the same idea had ocunder several seconds longer than his companion.

As Ted arose at the rear end of the raft he found himself right by the side of Bud Morgan, and a second later Kit Summers came to the surface next to Bud.

The heads of the three rough riders were hidden from the bandits on the shore by the ends of the logs which composed the raft, but, through the chinks, Ted could see their enemies upon the bank.

At an order from Ted, Morgan and Summers worked their way around to the side of the raft opposite to that of the outlaws and then made slowly toward the shore, Ted closely following them.

Ted could see that the bandits were still standing where they had first appeared to view, and that, with their rifles grasped for instant use, they were scanning the surface of the lake for the reappearance of their enemies.

As Ted, Bud and Kit drew in close to the shore and were within a couple of rods of the bandits, the rifles of the three outlaws were suddenly raised and they all shot at once.

Ben Tremont, when he had dived, had miscalculated the position of the raft. He had taken a long breath before he went under the surface of the water and stayed under several seconds longer than his companions.

When he finally came to the surface he found himself several rods from the raft and quite a distance out in the lake.

His eyes were turned directly toward the shore, and he saw at once that he had been sighted by the bandits, for they had raised their weapons and the barrels were pointed directly toward him.

Taking a quick breath, Ben dived again just as the three bandits pressed their triggers.

He escaped the bullets, but by a very narrow margin.

When the reports of the three rifles rang out, almost simultaneously, Ted whispered to his companions: "Now is our only time. Be quick!"

Before the three men had time to operate the magazines of their rifles they found three of the young rough riders bearing down upon them.

Ted reached the foremost villain before the bandit could reverse his weapon for a club, and received a smash in the face from the young rough rider's fist that laid him on his back.

Ted snatched the fallen man's rifle, and, swinging it by the barrel about his head, threw it with all his might at the head of the second bandit.

The weapon landed square across the face of the villain, and the man staggered back, with a groan of pain, dropping his own weapon to the ground.

Kit Summers had not been so fortunate, for, as he sprang toward the third outlaw, he had received a severe blow on the shoulder from the bandit's clubbed rifle.

Kit staggered back just as Bud Morgan picked up the rifle that the second outlaw had dropped.

Kit's antagonist was about to follow up his advantage when he was suddenly felled by Bud Morgan.

In the meantime Ted had started to follow up his punishment of the second outlaw, when the bandit who had been knocked into the bushes by Ted's fist arose to his feet and started toward the young rough rider with a gleaming knife in his hand.

A cry from Kit warned Ted, and the young rough rider turned just in time to avoid being stabbed.

Bud Morgan then rushed to his assistance and hit the villain such a rap over the head with the clubbed rifle that the man dropped in his tracks insensible.

The second bandit, seeing two of his companions insensible, now took to the woods at full speed, and Ted sprang after him.

Through the fringe of trees and rank grass ran the outlaw, with Ted close in pursuit.

Kit and Bud quickly bound the two insensible prisoners, and were about to follow their young leader when Ben Tremont crawled out of the lake and approached.

Seeing blood upon Ben's arm, Kit paused to see if he could aid Tremont, while Morgan ran after Ted.

Ben's wound proved to be trivial, and the blood was easily checked by binding a handkerchief around the arm.

The outlaw whom Ted was pursuing ran directly toward the camp, but when the first camp fire was reached Ted had gained on the man.

Seeing that he would soon be captured if he continued his flight, the villain stopped before the fire and snatched from the flames the protruding end of a long resinous limb from a spruce tree.

The opposite end of the limb was all ablaze.

Swinging the burning brand about his head, the villain succeeded for a minute in keeping Ted away from him. Then, as the outlaw saw Bud Morgan break through the line of trees, he gave a yell and threw the flaming limb directly in the face of the young rough rider.

Had Ted not been closely watching the actions of the bandit, he might have received serious injuries. As it was, he quickly dodged as the brand flew through the air and escaped with a few slight burns on his hands.

As quick as the burning limb fell to the ground Ted jumped forward again, and, as the bandit turned to flee, the villain's foot caught in some of the branches upon the fire.

He tripped, and, with a yell of dismay, fell right across the fire.

Ted hurried forward, and, catching the bandit by the heel, jerked him from the flames. The man's garments had caught fire, but the flames were smothered before the villain had been seriously burned.

A moment later the man was securely bound, as his companions had been a few moments before.

Ted was certain that there was one remaining member of Casse's band, but a search of the outlaws' camp failed to show his whereabouts.

On questioning the prisoner, however, Ted learned that one of the bandits had died since reaching the mountain because of the injuries received by a fall from one of the rocky peaks.

Ted did not doubt the story, and was now satisfied that he had all of Casse's living followers securely bound.

The remaining work of the young rough riders was the capture of the leader of the band and his dangerously clever wife.

Placing their prisoners upon the raft, the four rough riders proceeded back across the lake to the place where they had left Bob Martin and Frank O'Melia guarding the other three prisoners and the mouth of the passage which led down into the mountain.

Just as they approached the bank of the lake, Ted and his companions heard several quick shots from behind the big bowlder.

Leaving Ben Tremont and Kit Summers to tie the raft and remove the prisoners to the rocky plateau, Ted and Bud jumped to the shore and made a dash toward the rock.

CHAPTER XVI.

CASSE'S DESPERATE PLAY.

As Ted rounded the rock, after hearing the shots, he found Frank O'Melia with a smoking revolver in his

hand, facing the spot where the rocky passage came to the surface.

Beside Frank, at full length upon the ground, stretched the inanimate body of Bob Martin.

"What happened, Frank?" asked Ted.

"Frank Casse showed his head above the passage and fired at us," was the reply. "The bullet hit Bob, and he fell like a bag of sand."

"Then you fired?"

"Yes."

"Did you hit the villain?"

"I don't know."

Ted sprang toward the passage and saw below the outlaw and his wife talking together. The woman had hold of her husband's sleeve and seemed to be urging him not to proceed up the passage.

As Ted's form blocked the light in the passage Casse gazed quickly up and then turned and vanished beyond the turn in the passage, his wife following him.

Ted turned and picked up the revolver lying by the side of Bob Martin's body and quickly descended the passage, followed by Bud Morgan, who had borrowed O'Melia's weapon.

When Ted came to the turn in the cavern he saw the outlaw quite a distance ahead, descending the passage with all possible haste.

Casse lighted a torch, and Ted had little difficulty in following him.

When Ted had determined that he was slowly gaining on the retreating outlaw, Casse suddenly stopped and began working a knob on a door leading to a branch passage.

For some reason the door would not open readily, and Ted took advantage of the delay to double his exertions to catch up with the bandit.

As Ted drew up within a few yards of Casse, the outlaw suddenly gave up tugging at the door and faced his enemy.

As the outlaw's hand shot up with a revolver leveled at Ted the young rough rider drew his own weapon to the level.

Casse's trigger clicked, but the cartridge did not explode.

At the moment Ted pulled his trigger he stumbled on a loose stone and the bullet flew wide of the mark.

Throwing his revolver far down the passage, Casse hurled his lighted torch toward his pursuers and darted into the open door of a passage opposite the one he had been trying to enter, shouting as he disappeared from view:

"Follow me in here if you dare!"

The outlaw's wife, her face seemingly chalk-white with fear, followed her husband.

When Ted and Bud came opposite the passage entered by the outlaw and his faithful wife they saw the passage was entirely dark.

Their eyes could not penetrate more than a rod or two, and they saw that Casse had refrained from taking a light with him.

Bud Morgan stepped several yards into the passage and struck a match.

As the tiny flame for a moment lighted up the walls, Ted gave a sudden exclamation of alarm:

"The passage with the white ceiling!"

Sure enough. In the flickering light of the burning match the ceiling of the passage seemed to be composed of chalk.

"Limestone," muttered Bud.

"Yes," returned Ted, "or white granite."

"This must be ther passage ther old man warned yer about, Ted," said Bud Morgan.

"I think so."

"Well, what will we do? We ain't goin' ter let ther villain get away from us, be we?" asked Bud.

Before Ted could answer there came a voice out of the gloom beyond them.

It was the voice of Frank Casse, and these were the words:

"Ted Strong, you have got me on the hip, but you shall never capture me alive. I have sworn it time and again. No man shall take me a prisoner. You have me cornered, but you dare not follow me in here. There is coal in the walls of this passage. This passage leads right under the big reservoir. The moment you pursue me in here I will light a match."

"What a terrible threat," exclaimed Bud Morgan. "Say, Ted, ther feller says if yer chase him he will light a match."

"Hush," commanded the young rough rider. Ted was interested in what the outlaw was saying, for he knew Casse was no man to jest, particularly under the present circumstances. Casse continued:

"I say if you pursue me I will light a match. Further along this passage is filled with methane or fire damp. A lighted match will explode it instantly and set the whole passage on fire. It will blow a hole through the bottom of the big lake and flood every passage in the mountain."

"You dare not take the chance," exclaimed Ted. "It would mean instant death to yourself and your wife."

"I am a desperate man, Ted Strong, and I mean what I say."

Ted understood now the meaning of the old man's warning concerning the passage with the white ceiling.

Methane, or fire damp, as it is called by miners, is a gas formed in mines—coal mines principally—from the decay of vegetable matter combined with certain other conditions.

The gas has no color, taste nor odor. Mixed with air, it explodes violently when ignited, and the explosion pro-

duces a gas equally dangerous, known as carbon dioxide, or "choke damp." This gas, when inhaled, will almost instantly suffocate a human being.

When there is a large amount of fire damp, as was probably the case in the passage in which the outlaw and his wife had taken refuge, the explosion would probably be terrific.

Nevertheless, Ted did not more than half believe that the outlaw would have the nerve to make the desperate play he had threatened.

With a low word to Bud, Ted sprang forward down the passage, with the hope of reaching the outlaw before he could put his threat into execution.

Ted was not quick enough, however, for as he sprang forward he heard the scratching of a match.

Ted paused. The match did not at first ignite.

Then the noise was repeated, and as Ted saw the first evidence of a flame he turned and fled for his life.

Casse had carried out his threat.

There was the sound of a terrible explosion. The whole mountain seemed to tremble.

Then before the eyes of the young rough rider came the sight of a great mass of flame. The whole passage seemed on fire.

Then Ted knew no more.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

Bud Morgan was several steps behind his young friend when the explosion took place. The older man was nearly taken off his feet by the sudden rush of air, but he managed to reach Ted just as the young rough rider fell.

Grasping the young man by the shoulders, Bud dragged him the few feet out of the passage to the main tunnel and a few yards up that passage toward the top of the mountain.

He had hardly accomplished this feat when from the burning passage came a fearful roar, and a great volume of water gushed out and went roaring down the passage they were in toward the bottom of the mountain.

With the first rush of waters Bud Morgan caught a glimpse of two tossing human bodies, the corpses of Frank Casse and his wife.

The career of the desperate bandit chief had ended for all time.

In a short time Morgan succeeded in bringing Ted back to consciousness, and as the young rough rider sat up he told him of what had taken place.

The rushing waters soon put out the fire in the passage, but it was several hours before the water had been drained entirely out of the big reservoir, so that the young rough riders could descend the mountain passage.

It was found that Bob Martin had not been killed. The bullet from Casse's revolver had just grazed his temple, rendering him unconscious. In half an hour he had recovered.

The horses and other accouterments of the bandits were brought to the passage and taken below with the party of young rough riders and their prisoners.

Arriving at the bed of the old crater, the young rough riders found that the water from the reservoir had found its level and that only about a foot of it covered the bed of the crater.

Before making their way to the natural elevator, the party made a search for the bodies of old John Casse, Frank Casse and the woman.

They found John Casse's body several rods from where it had been left by them, and they took it to the crater, preparatory to removal to the outside of the mountain.

Later the terribly mangled bodies of Frank Casse and his wife were found in one corner of the crater bed.

The young rough riders had a long wait then for the rising of the natural elevator, but at length they found themselves in the old mine shaft, with all their belongings, the three dead bodies and their prisoners.

As Ted advanced from the shaft he was suddenly greeted by a familiar voice:

"Hello, Ted!"

"Leo Morrissey!"

"Yes, it is me," responded Morrissey. "We had an awful time following your trail, and just arrived here a short time ago."

Morrissey was accompanied by several armed men, including the sheriff of Gallego, from whose jail the bandits had escaped.

Ted turned the prisoners immediately over to the sheriff.

After the remains of the dead were buried Ted told Morrissey and his companions of the adventures of the young rough riders in the mountain, of the way himself and Bud Morgan had been trapped and the other incidents, up to the outlaw chief's desperate play in igniting the fire damp.

Then Morrisey's party rode away toward Gallego with the prisoners, while Ted and his party struck a trail leading toward Los Angeles.

Ted's first business on reaching that beautiful California town was the cashing of the old miner's check.

John Casse's directions regarding the expenditure of the money were faithfully carried out, and when the young rough riders had attended to these details they once more continued their pleasure trip.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 54) will contain "The Young Rough Riders' Still Hunt; or, The Mystery of Dead Man's Pass." In this exciting story you will learn how this dreaded desperado, formerly captured, escaped, and how Black Bess played a wonderful part in consigning him to his doom.

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